



STATUS QUAESTIONIS REPORT # 2

Ifá and Islām as Sibling Rivals: The Black Arabian Origins of the Yorùbá

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An excerpt from:

*Aḷlāh and Olódùmarè:
Islām and Ifá as Sibling Rivals*
(forthcoming)

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"We, the tribe of Shabazz, says Allah (God), were the first to discover the best part of our planet to live on. The rich Nile Valley of Egypt and the present seat of the Holy City, Mecca, Arabia." The Honorable Elijah Muhammad

Introduction

Professor Razaq Olatunde Rom Kalilu of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria, observed in 1997 that there exists “a paradoxical relationship of love and hate between the Yorùbá culture and Islam”. He says further: “That paradoxical relation itself was a result of some similarities and contrasts in the cultures which both the indigenous Yorùbá religions setup and Islam radiated.”¹

I believe that this “paradoxical relationship of love and hate” between Ifá, the Yoruban religious tradition, and Islam is most aptly described as a sibling rivalry. A sibling rivalry is competition or animosity among siblings, particularly (though not exclusively) siblings that are close of age and of the same gender. Because they are siblings, there is naturally love between them (unless something egregious is done to change that). But their rivalry also produces animosity and hate at times. In my forthcoming book, *Allāh and Olódùmarè: Islām and Ifá as Sibling Rivals*, I document the close relationship between the Arabian and the West African religious traditions. I argue that that this close relationship, which has been characterized over the centuries by love and hate, exchange and competition, is a sibling rivalry. That Ifá and Islam are close in age is acknowledged in a Yorùbá proverb:

Ayé la bá 'Fá
Ayé la bá 'Màle
Òsán gangan ni 'Gbògba wọlé dé

Ifá is as old as life
Islam is as old as life
It was at noonday that Christianity came in.

This proverb has the two religious traditions coexisting from the beginning with the third religion – Christianity – being the new kid on the block. I argue that, as siblings, Ifá and Islam have the same father (the magico-religion of ancient Black Arabia) but different mothers (indigenous West African tradition/Qur'ānic tradition). My book, from which this report is excerpted, details the common origins of Ifá and Islam and documents the closeness and distance of the two as theological paradigms.

Nigerian linguist and exegete Modupe Oduyoye collected data for a yet unpublished work entitled, *African Words in the Bible and the Qur'an*. Oduyoye maintains that “there are *cruces interpretationis* (i.e. passages very difficult to interpret) in the Hebrew Bible and the Arabic Qur'an which can be resolved only by resort to comparative linguistic data from African languages.”² Oduyoye very ably demonstrated this for the Hebrew Bible in his 1984 publication, *The Sons of the Gods and the Daughters of Men: An Afro-Asiatic Interpretation of Genesis 1-11*.³ Unfortunately, any similar work that Oduyoye has done on the Qur'ān has, to my knowledge, not been published. In *Allāh and Olódùmarè*, I intend to fill this lacuna. I illustrate that, not only does West African religious and linguistic tradition, Yorùbá in particular,

¹ Razaq Olatunde Rom Kalilu, “Beaded Figure With Leather Sandals: Islam, Historical Cognition, and the Visual Arts of the Yoruba,” *Africa* 53 (1997): 591.

² Modupe Oduyoye, “The Spirits that Rule the world: African Religions & Judaism,” in *African Origins of the Major World Religions*, ed. Amon Saba Saakana (London: Karnak House, 1991) 61.

³ Modupe Oduyoye, *The Sons of the Gods and the Daughters of Men: An Afro-Asiatic Interpretation of Genesis 1-11* (Maryknoll, New York and Ibadan, Nigeria: Orbis Books and Daystar Press, 1984).

illuminate some parts of the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition in general, but also that the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition can shed light on some Yoruban tradition.

“Status quaestionis” is a Latin phrase meaning “the state of the investigation” and refers to scholarly presentations of the accumulated data relevant to a controversial and unresolved topic. TGI publishes Status Quaestionis Reports on various debated Religious Studies topics.

Were the Yorùbá Arabians?

The Yorubas tell a very interesting story about their origin. They say they came from Saudi Arabia, what is now Saudi Arabia...(In) the early days before the Red Sea expanded to what it is...it was just a trickle river, because the Red Sea is just an expansion of the Rift Gorge...the Rift Valley that runs all the way up to Turkey and starts down below Tanzania. That same Valley (is) where most of life found its beginning. That water in the Red Sea has covered up that valley so there's a lot of black bones down there. But this piece of land which is now desert, but wasn't always desert, that is called Saudi Arabia, is the center of the home of these African peoples who call themselves Yorubas. In ancient times that (area, Saudi Arabia) was...the eastern sector of what we now call Egypt or sometimes called Eastern Ethiopia. Baba James Small

On the basis of language...the Yoruba people could not have originated from either Arabia, Egypt, or Nubia...the Yoruba language has no family relationship with Arabic, the primary language of the people of Mecca and the rest of Arabia. Professor J.A. Atanda ⁴

James Small, African American historian as well as Ifá priest, is above articulating the official, traditional Yorùbá view of their origin from Arabia. J.A. Atanda, Nigerian historian from the University of Ibadan, is on the other hand articulating the current scholarly view, which dismisses the traditional view of Arabian origins in the light of some linguistic and archaeological data suggesting indigenous African origins.⁵ Can the orthodox tradition be reconciled with the data? I believe it can, in broad terms though not in all of its details. Did the Yorùbá people originate in Arabia or not? Yes, and no. All Yorùbá-speaking groups did not originate in Arabia, but an important (and defining) one did.



Yorubaland

Although now often considered as a single “people,” in pre-colonial times the Yorùbá did not form a political unit but comprised of several separate states in southwestern Nigeria. “Yorùbá” in fact is a blanket term covering several different subgroups which are linguistically and culturally related but very distinct populations; for example the Oyo in the north; Ife, Ijesà, Ekiti, and Ondó in the east; Ijebú and Egbá in the south; Ketu in the west, etc. The term “Yorùbá” was actually originally an alternative name for only one of these groups, the northern Oyo. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, this term was expanded to cover the whole linguistic group, and the British colonial administration was partly responsible for this Oyo-

⁴ J.A. Atanda, “Samuel Johnson and the Origins of the Yoruba People,” in *Pioneer, Patriot and Patriarch: Samuel Johnson and the Yoruba People*, ed. Toyin Falola (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994) 100 [art. 95-104].

⁵ On the archaeology see for example B. Agbaje-Williams, “Samuel Johnson, Yoruba Origins, and Archeology,” in *Pioneer, Patriot and Patriarch: Samuel Johnson and the Yoruba People*, ed. Toyin Falola (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994) 105-114.

centrism:

the British...cannot be absolved of double-dealing in their methods of colonial rule. Despite the fact that the sovereignty of each of the Yoruba kingdoms was recognized by the series of treaties signed between each of them and the British before any agreement was signed with Oyo, another treaty, signed in 1893, acknowledged the Alaafin (Oyo ruler) as the overall ruler of Yorubaland.⁶

This Oyo-centrism that was covertly promoted by the British resulted in a pan-“Yorùbá”-ism, i.e. a situation in which a single ethnic population, the Oyo-Yorùbá, defined the entire linguistic group. It is this artificial, British imposed Oyo-centric pan-Yorùbá-ism that I believe is the cause of the (only apparent) conflict between the Yorùbá tradition of origins and the linguistic/archaeological data. Many writers make the mistake of conflating narratives of the origin of kingdoms and dynasties with the origin of whole peoples. *All* of the Yorùbá-speaking populations of West Africa did not originate in Arabia, but the defining Oyo (Yorùbá proper) did.

Samuel Johnson and the Yoruban Official History

Reverend Samuel Johnson's (1846-1901) *History of the Yoruba* (Lagos, 1921) is championed as a recension of the official traditional history of the Yorùbá, specifically of the Oyo.⁷ Himself of Yoruban descent, Johnson is “the most celebrated historian of the Yoruba people” and “the pioneer historian of the Yoruba.” His *History* is considered “a privileged source of pride in the Yoruba heritage,” despite the fact that it has some severe shortcomings.⁸ Not only was Johnson not a trained historian but, as a member of the Church Missionary Society at Ibadan in Oyo, “He had his own, strongly Christian perspective on Yoruba history.”⁹ Nevertheless, it is with good reason that his work still remains “the cornerstone of Yoruba studies.”¹⁰

This work seems to have become the standard national historical account of Oyo society. Literate Oyo informants either regard it as *the* history of Oyo and the Yoruba or as a frame of reference for a narration of their own local histories.¹¹

The good reason for this continued reliance on Johnson's account is that Johnson's primary sources for his *History* were good: the *Arokin*, official historians of the Oyo court. These are the oral traditionists and musicians who serve the *Alaàfin* or Oyo ruler. The *Arokin* are a hereditary corporation of male praise-singers and specialists of the past: court bards or griots, if you will.¹² The institution is said to go back to Ọ̀rànmíyàn, grandson of the Yorùbá ancestor,

⁶ Cornelius O. Adepegba, “The Descent From Oduduwa: Claims of Superiority Among Some Yoruba Traditional Rulers of Ancient Ife,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19 (1986): 79.

⁷ Robin Law, “How Truly Traditional is Our Traditional History? The Case of Samuel Johnson and the Recording of Yoruba Oral Tradition,” *History of Africa* 11 (1984) 196.

⁸ See e.g. the collection of essays in *Pioneer, Patriot and Patriarch: Samuel Johnson and the Yoruba People*, ed. Toyin Falola (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994).

⁹ Law, “How Truly Traditional,” 197.

¹⁰ Robin Law, “The ‘Hamitic Hypothesis’ in Indigenous West African Historical Thought,” *History of Africa* 36 (2009): 111.

¹¹ B.A Agiri, “Early Oyo History Reconsidered,” *History of Africa* 2 (1975):1.

¹² On their work see Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias, “History and Consolation: Royal Yorùbá Bards Comment on Their Craft,” *History of Africa* 19 (1992): 263-297.

Odùdúwà. They are therefore looked to for the official history of the Oyo. Johnson himself was a descendent of the Aláàfin Abíòdún (r. 1770-1789) and this “circumstance...opened to him important sources of oral tradition in Oyo itself.”¹³ In the late nineteenth century (between 1887-1897) Johnson interviewed the sitting Aròkin in New Oyo during the Aláàfinatè (rulership) of Adéyemí I (r. 1875-1905). Thus, while the history which Johnson presents in his *History* is a “highly tendentious”¹⁴ and “heavily edited” sample of Aròkin oral history,¹⁵ underneath his own manipulations is some authentic Oyo-Yorùbá tradition of great significance.¹⁶

According to Johnson’s version, the “Yorùbá” (he too is a victim of the British-promoted Oyo-centric pan-Yorùbá-ism) sprung from an apostate Muslim from Arabia named Odùdúwà. Odùdúwà was a magician-turned-Muslim who then relapsed back into idolatry. His father, Lámúrudú (whom Johnson erroneously identifies with the Biblical Nimrod¹⁷) was a Meccan “king,” which no doubt means only that he was a clan leader or ruler (*shaykh*) in or around Mecca in Arabia. Odùdúwà’s relapse into idolatry attracted many and they called for the official return to the religion of the Jāhiliya (pre-Islamic Arabian “paganism”). Odùdúwà reportedly converted a mosque to an idol temple and when a pious Muslim broke the idol a civil war erupted during which Odùdúwà’s father, Lámúrudú, was killed. The Muslims prevailed in this civil war, running Odùdúwà and his followers out of Arabia westward into Africa via Upper Egypt. Odùdúwà is described as *omo Òrìṣà*, “child of the Orisha” because he brought with them out of Arabia two idols and these will be the basis of the religion he brings to West Africa. They eventually settled in Ilé Ife, the center of Yorubaland. A Muslim army was dispatched after them but was defeated. Odùdúwà and sons then “swore a mortal hatred of the Moslems of their country and were determined to avenge themselves of them.”¹⁸

The Continuing Value of Johnson’s *History*

Such is Johnson’s rendition of the royal Aròkin’s oral history of the Yorùbá. Can we countenance it? There are certainly elements of Johnson’s recounting that can be dismissed, such as his Christianization of the Yorùbá (he tries to make them former Coptic Christians) and general *biblicalization* of the narrative,¹⁹ as well as his uncritical assimilation of some Arabic literary traditions that likely came to his awareness through local Muslims close to the court.²⁰ But does this render his account totally valueless in regards the origin of the Oyo-Yorùbá? Not

¹³ Agiri, “Early Oyo History Reconsidered,” 3.

¹⁴ Robin Law, “The Heritage of Oduduwa: Traditional History and Political Propaganda among the Yoruba,” *The Journal of African History* 14 (1973): 208.

¹⁵ de Moraes Farias, “History and Consolation,” 265.

¹⁶ Dierk Lange, “Origin of the Yoruba and ‘The Lost Tribes of Israel,’” *Anthropos* 106 (2011): 583.

¹⁷ “The Nimrod tradition of the Yoruba, which turns Oduduwa into a son of Nimrod who lived in Mecca, was recorded only by S. Johnson.” Dierk Lange, “Links Between West Africa and the Ancient Orient,” in Dierk Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa: Africa-centered and Canaanite-Israelite Perspective* (Dettelback, 2004): 322 n. 13. The Yoruban Muslim scholar, Al-Hajj Ādam al-Ilūrī of Agége (Lagos), in his book, *Aṣl Qabā’il Yūrūbā* (“The Origin of the Yoruba Tribes”) (n.p.; n.p., 1977) 24, also rightly rejects Johnson’s singular association of the Aròkin’s “Lamurudu” with the Biblical and post-Biblical Nimrod. American Missionary Thomas Bowen in the 1850’s asked around among the Yoruba about this claim and found that “The Yorubas...themselves...know nothing of Nimrod.” *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa, 1849-1856* (Charleston, 1857) 268.

¹⁸ Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yorubas* (Lagos, 1921) 3-7.

¹⁹ Atanda, “Samuel Johnson,” 97, 98-99.

²⁰ Lange, “Origin of the Yoruba,” 583; Law, “How many Times,” 40.

according to Dierk Lange, Professor Emeritus of African History at the University of Bayreuth (Germany):

Details of the story show evidence of extensive borrowing from Arabic sources...However, under the layer of the interpretive Arab story we find elements of an authentic tradition: though not necessarily in Mecca, the ancestors of the Yoruba once lived in the Near East...their ancestral king was killed in the course of a popular uprising; his son Oduduwa fled with many people, some of whom settled en route to later Yorubaland.²¹

Even Robin Law, Professor Emeritus of (African) History at the University of Stirling (United Kingdom), who believes that the history told to Johnson by the Arōkin was political propaganda fabricated in the interests of Aláàfin Àtìbà (an untenable theory),²² yet concedes:

It does not, of course, follow that the traditions relating to the early history of Oyo are wholly without historical value. Although much of their content probably reflects the propaganda of Atiba in the 1830's, it is very likely that they also incorporate elements of authentic tradition.²³

We can confirm (below) that one of the “elements of authentic tradition” of the Arōkin is the Arabian homeland of the original *omọ Ọrìṣà*. In addition, there are several reasons for accepting the basic premise of the Arōkin history as narrated to Johnson (minus the latter's interpolations), such as the following:

I. *General Agreement With Historical Arabian Context*

The general details of the narrative as presented by Johnson agree well with what we know of seventh century Arabia. Odùdúwà's abandonment of Islam and return to the pre-Islamic magic and idolatry with the resulting civil war should certainly be seen in the context of the phenomenon well-known in Islamic history called the *Ridda* Wars or Wars of Apostasy. During the last years of the Prophet Muhammad's life (d. 632) and following the establishment of Abu Bakr as the first Caliph, a number of tribes from central, east and south Arabia (e.g. the Ghatafān, the Hawāzin and the Tayy') apostasized, renouncing their allegiance to Islam and its

²¹ Lang, “Origin of the Yoruba,” 583.

²² Aláàfin Àtìbà (r. 1837-1859) founded New Oyo (Oyo Atiba) as the new capital of the Oyo Kingdom in 1837-1839. In his earlier days as a warlord Àtìbà was forced to convert to Islam. Upon his ascension to the Aláàfinate in 1837 his renounced Islam. Law sees the motive for the creation of the story told by the Arōkin to Johnson as twofold: 1.) to justify Àtìbà's controversial decision to relocated the Oyo capital by establishing an earlier precedent and 2.) by making Odùdúwà an apostate to Islam, Àtìbà offers a precedent for his own renunciation of Islam upon his ascension. Law, “How Truly Traditional,” 218 n. 65; idem, “How Many Times Can History Repeat Itself? Some Problems in the Traditional History of Oyo,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18 (1985): 41, 45. While this theory may account for some of the details of the tradition, it *cannot* explain the basic narrative, as he himself concedes that an authentic tradition is likely at the root. He also confessed the Arōkin's inherent inability to pull off the political creation of a history out of whole cloth: “Too often, it appears, historians and anthropologists of Africa have been content to credit the rulers of African societies with a power like that of the Military of Truth in Orwell's 1984, to make alterations in the existing view of history at will, to suit their changing purposes, and to win instant acceptance of each successive revised version...The *Alaḥin* of Oyo, it is true, disposed of a body of official historians attached to his court and under his personal control (the *Arōkin*), but while this might have facilitated the propagation of revised versions of the traditions, it did not guarantee acceptance of them. It was necessary to persuade and convince, and resistance to the alteration of the received view of history is likely to have been considerable. The case of Oyo suggests two reflections upon the means by which traditional history might be altered. First, there were limitations on the degree of revision that was workable. It was not possible to alter or fabricate the history of a kingdom or country in its entirety. Rather, it was necessary to accept the bulk of the received tradition and limit modifications to as small and peripheral as possible.” Law, “Heritage of Oduduwa,” 207, 221.

²³ Law, “How Many Times,” 46.

leadership. These tribes were led by powerful personalities such as Ṭulayḥa of Banū Assad, a wealthy chieftain who accepted Islam from Muhammad in 630 and then rebelled against him in 631. Many followed Ṭulayḥa and he led a confederacy of tribes against the Muslims, much like Odūdúwà led a confederacy of tribes against the Muslims according to Johnson. Also, Sajāḥ bint al-Ḥārith, a soothsayer-turned-prophetess of the Banū Tamīm, rebelled against the Muslims. Interestingly her father, al-Ḥārith, was from a sub-tribe of the Tamīm called the Banū Yarbā. Does this Yarbā tribe have anything to do with the Yorùbá who were driven out of Arabia? Most infamously is the counter-prophet Musaylimah of the Banū Ḥanīfa. Musaylimah was, like Odūdúwà, a “skilled magician” and lord of a sacred enclave (*ḥarām*) in Yamamah.²⁴ Abu Bakr and his Muslim troops eventually defeated most of the aposotasizing tribes and re-integrated them back into the Muslim polity. However, it is definitely feasible that unrecorded in the boastful Arabic-Muslim sources of the ninth century and beyond are tribes and confederacies such as that of Odūdúwà who did not submit to re-integration but instead fled Arabia.



Arabic Magic Square

²⁴ See *The Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān* 3:460-464 s.v. Musaylima by M.J. Kister; M.J. Kister, “The Struggle Against Musaylima and the Conquest of Yamāma,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 27 (2002): 1-56; Dale Eickelman, “Musaylima: An Approach to the Social Anthropology of Seventh Century Arabia,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 10 (1967): 17-53.

II. *Minimal Muslim Influence Detected*

A number of scholars today reject the Yoruban historical narrative on the assumption that it reflects, not actual history, but the impact of Muslim literary sources on indigenous African oral traditions.²⁵ It is theorized that as the keepers of tradition became familiar with Islamic sources, they manipulated their history in order to invent a prestigious pedigree to compete with Muslims and Christians.²⁶ This theory, as well as being racially condescending,²⁷ is defied by certain facts that indicate that growing awareness of and access to Islamic sources had only a tangential, cosmetic impact on Yoruban historiography.

The Aròkin whom Johnson interviewed between 1887-1897 were non-Muslims serving a non-Muslim Aláàfin. And while enough Arabic-Islamic literature and folklore was available from local Muslims to have impacted local tradition on a cosmetic level, the theory that these non-Muslim keepers of the Yorùbá past were impacted enough to totally, artificially *Islamize* or *anti-Islamize* their history is untenable.²⁸

The rather cosmetic impact of Islamic influence can be seen by comparing the non-Muslim Aròkin tradition of the late nineteenth century with the Muslim Aròkin tradition of the twentieth. It was only during the reign of Aláàfin Ládìgbòlù I (1911-1944), a non-Muslim ruler, that the Aròkin began taking on a Muslim identity. By 1988, when P.F. de Moraes Farias interviewed the presiding Aròkin at the royal palace of Oyo, they were Islamized. de Moraes Farias wanted specifically to assess the impact of Islamization on Yorùbá traditional history.²⁹ Some differences with the narrative presented to and by Johnson are indeed noticeable when compared with the narrative offered by the 1988 Muslim Aròkin. The Islamic prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham) is now explicitly introduced and identified with in the Muslim Aròkin retelling of the history. Also, it is not from the holy city Mecca itself that the allegedly apostate, idolatrous Yorùbá ancestors hailed, but from a city near Mecca called Mòndiánà, likely a reference to the Qur'ānic city Madyan, famous for rebellion (Qur'ān 7:85-93).³⁰ These are transparently tendentious changes. But the most glaring change is in the reason for the Yorùbá ancestors' exit from Arabia. Nàmúdù, an alternative rendering of the name Lámúrudú (the father), had two sons who were sibling rivals and often fought. It was this sibling rivalry, rather than a Muslim-"Pagan" civil war, that led to the younger son's departure from his Arabian homeland; no civil war, no death of Nàmúdù/Lámúrudú, and thus no "mortal hatred" of the Muslims. We will discover below that there is good evidence that this element of mortal hatred for Arabian

²⁵ Called *feedback*: input into oral sources from later written sources. See David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London: Longman, 1982).

²⁶ Law, "'Hamitic Hypothesis,'" 304.

²⁷ "countless versions of innumerable myths of origin...enjoy currency in the region between the Sahara and the northern edge of Africa's intertropical forest. Almost all the heroes of these sagas come from lands along the Red Sea: Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Arabia peninsula": Fatimata Mounkaïla and Jefferey S. Ankrom, "Ancestors from the East in Sahelo-Sudanese Myth: Dinga Soninké, Zabarkâne Zarma, and Others," *Research in African Literatures* 24 (1993): 13. A theory suggesting that *all* of these African peoples were easily duped by local immigrant Muslims or possessed such a low sense of self that they would want to deny their own history to fabricate a new one that would "match" that for foreign Muslims and Christians says more about the thinking of the persons who articulate such a theory than it does about African peoples.

²⁸ Lange, "Links," 321-322.

²⁹ Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias, "'Yoruba Origins' Revisited by Muslims: An interview with the Aròkin of Oyo and a reading of the *Aṣl Qabā'il Yūrubbā* of Al-Ḥājj Ādam al-Ilūrī," in P.F. de Moraes Farias and Karin Barber (edd.), *Self-Assertion and Brokerage: Early Cultural Nationalism in West Africa* (Birmingham: Birmingham University Center of West African Studies, 1990) 109-147.

³⁰ de Moraes Farias, "Yoruba Origins' Revisited," 122.

Muslims is an ancient and authentic element of the narrative which the now Muslim Aròkin sought to attenuate for obvious reasons. Notwithstanding these cosmetic modifications, the basic narrative remained the same after a century and after Islamization of the Aròkin:

By comparison with the nineteenth century Aròkin accounts...there has been considerable attenuation, here, of the conflict between followers of Islam and votaries of the religion of the Oriṣà. The reason Odùdúwà leaves Arabia is a conflict with his brother rather than a civil war between Muslims and pagans...Nevertheless two central points of the stories recorded by Johnson remain: Odùdúwà comes to Yorubaland as an *omo Oriṣà* ("child of the Oriṣha/idol"), and he is the son of Nàmúdù...There is no attempt to present Odùdúwà or his followers as Muslims, nor to find other Arabian ancestors for the Yoruba Muslims of today.³¹

It was expected that the increasing influence of Islam at the Oyo court in the twentieth century would have fundamentally altered the traditions inherited from the nineteenth century non-Muslim Aròkin. To their surprise, scholars have found just the opposite. While it "may have attenuated some of the clashes between the Yorùbá ancestors and Islam depicted in the nineteenth century versions," "increased influence of Islam has not fundamentally altered the thrust of the versions of these stories reported by Johnson."³² There is thus no reason to reject as Islam-inspired the basic story as presented to Johnson. Had scholars took seriously Robin Law's sober insight in 1973, they would not in fact have been so surprised at this basic narrative continuity:

Too often, it appears, historians and anthropologists of Africa have been content to credit the rulers of African societies with a power like that of the Military of Truth in Orwell's *1984*, to make alterations in the existing view of history at will, to suit their changing purposes, and to win instant acceptance of each successive revised version...The *Alafin* of Oyo, it is true, disposed of a body of official historians attached to his court and under his personal control (the *Aròkin*), but while this might have facilitated the propagation of revised versions of the traditions, it did not guarantee acceptance of them. It was necessary to persuade and convince, and resistance to the alteration of the received view of history is likely to have been considerable. The case of Oyo suggests two reflections upon the means by which traditional history might be altered. First, there were limitations on the degree of revision that was workable. It was not possible to alter or fabricate the history of a kingdom or country in its entirety. Rather, it was necessary to accept the bulk of the received tradition and limit modifications to as small and peripheral as possible.³³

"(I)t was necessary to accept the bulk of the received tradition and limit modifications to...small and peripheral": this is no doubt what we are dealing with here. While some *interpretatio Arabica* and *interpretatio Biblica* are notable, the bulk of the tradition as passed on by the Aròkin through the centuries is undoubtedly authentic and the modifications peripheral. We can take for granted, then, that authentic Oyo tradition has the Oyo-Yorùbá ancestors originating as practitioners of the pre-Islamic magico-religion of Arabia and, due to some manner of local conflict, were compelled to leave the peninsula, ending up in West Africa.

III. *Alternative Aròkin Account*

We have further evidence that this claim of Arabian origins for the Oyo-Yorùbá can be attributed neither to Johnson himself nor to Islamic influence; it is one of those "elements of authentic (Aròkin) tradition." This evidence is the testimony of Prince Moses Craig Adeyemi (d.

³¹ de Moraes Farias, "Yoruba Origins' Revisited," 122.

³² de Moraes Farias, "History and Consolation," 265.

³³ Law, "Heritage of Oduduwa," 207-222.

1942), grandson of Aláàfin Adeyemi (r. 1876-1905). We recall that it was Aláàfin Adeyemi's Aròkin whom Johnson, also of royal descent, interviewed and received his basic narrative from. Prince Adeyemi therefore was at least as privy to important sources of Oyo oral tradition as was Johnson, probably more so. In 1914, several years before Johnson's *History* was officially published, Prince Adeyemi wrote a history of Oyo called *Iwe Itan Oyo-Ile ati Oyo Isisiyi abi Ago-d' Oyo* "A History of Old and New Oyo." He received a B.A. in Classics in 1911 from Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leon and was accordingly the first Yorùbá with a university degree to write a history of the Yorùbá.³⁴

Prince Adeyemi's text, which represents Oyo traditions as they existed at the beginning of the century, opens simply: "The Yorùbá came from Medina, in the east."³⁵ This statement, and the text in which it is found, is notable on a number of accounts. The simple, matter-of-fact manner of stating this is consistent with Adeyemi's general neglect of the Oyo mythical traditions of origin.³⁶ He completely omits any discussion of Ilé-Ifẹ, the mythical *omphalos* ("navel of the earth") of the Yorùbá, nor does he show any interest in Odùdúwà or any of the legendary ancestors (though he does not discount them). This Arabian (Medinan) origin of the Oyo-Yorùbá is a strictly sober, historical statement of fact which he does not elaborate on. We can discount the theory that there is Islamic influence here. Like Johnson, Prince Adeyemi was affiliated with the Church Mission Society: he was an ordained deacon and pastor, and was made warden of the theological College of Saint Andrew's College, Oyo. He was thus properly Rev. Canon Adeyemi. Nevertheless, Adeyemi's "Christian religion apparently did not influence his attitude towards the past, as it did with Johnson and others. Even his account of the Oyo pantheon...is rather sympathetic."³⁷ It is hard to argue that, while his own Christian religious convictions did not have much influence on his reporting of Oyo-Yorùbá history, the competitor religion Islam did. Nor it is feasible to argue that Adeyemi was influenced by fellow Yoruban Christian historian Johnson. As Law says: "[Adeyemi's] text of history shows no sign of borrowing from Johnson, and can be accepted as an independent recension of Oyo traditions."³⁸

We have here independent, corroborating evidence of the nineteenth century Aròkin tradition of Arabian origins. The discrepancy between Adeyemi's Medina and Johnson's Mecca is of little significance, as the specific Arabian city may migrate with some retellings (cf. the Mòndiánà/Madyan of the 1988 Aròkin) for reasonable oral-historical reasons, but the fact of the Arabian genesis remains constant.

IV. Evidence From Outside Yorubaland: Borgu

From about the 6th/7th centuries A.D., there emerged mysterious leaders in the southern regions of today's Niger Republic and Northern Nigeria near Lake Chad. Their names still linger on even today in the traditions of different ethnic groups. These state-building foreigners (or their descendants) penetrated south from Borgu and Hausaland through Nupe, Jukun, Igala, and Yorubaland and eventually to Benin, Dahomey, and parts of Ghana.³⁹

³⁴ On Prince Adeyemi and his history of the Yorùbá see Toyin Falola, Michael R. Doortmont and C. Adeyemi, "Iwe Itan Oyo: A Traditional Yoruba History and Its Author," *Journal of African History* 30 (1989): 301-329.

³⁵ Falola, Doortmont and Adeyemi, "Iwe Itan Oyo," 312.

³⁶ Falola, Doortmont and Adeyemi, "Iwe Itan Oyo," 306.

³⁷ ³⁷ Falola, Doortmont and Adeyemi, "Iwe Itan Oyo," 304.

³⁸ Law, "How Many Times," 203.

³⁹ Dmitri M. Bondarenko and Peter M. Rose, "Benin Prehistory: The Origin and Settling down of the Edo," *Anthropos* 94 (1999): 547 (542-552)



Borgu Kingdom

Further evidence corroborating Johnson's basic narrative comes from non-Yorùbá state traditions, specifically Borgawa (of the Borgu Kingdom of Benin) and Hausa. The Benin Empire was southwest of Yorubaland in what is now southwest Nigeria. The Edo people of Benin and the Yorùbá are ethno-linguistically related, both being members of the Kwa language group. While the Edo in general have occupied their present location for about four thousand years according to archaeological and linguistic evidence, a secondary, minor population movement into the area is alluded to in tradition.⁴⁰ According to tradition the ruling dynasty of Benin is related to the Yoruban dynasties through common descent from Odùdúwà.⁴¹ In Benin, however, he is usually called "Kisra".

The Kisra legend...is common in the Northern Province of Nigeria from Wukari on the Benue River to Illo and Bussa on the Niger. It tells of a magician king...driven out of Arabia by the Prophet and who founded a series of pagan states in the Western Sudan.⁴²

According to local Benin tradition, "Kisra" – which we will see is no name but a title/description – lived in the seventh century in the Arabian city of Badr near Mecca, rather than in Mecca itself as Johnson reported (an easy mistaken identity). As said of Odùdúwà in Yorùbá tradition, Kisra was a skilled Arabian magician whose magic "was not bestowed on him by God." The prophet Muhammad, we are told, tried unsuccessfully to convert him to Islam and then warred with him. Kisra and his followers, which included both the Borgawa and the Yorùbá ancestors, were driven out of Arabia and fled westward into Africa.⁴³ They crossed the

⁴⁰ Bondarenko and Roese, "Benin Prehistory," 545.

⁴¹ A.F.C. Ryder, "A Reconsideration of the Ife-Benin Relationship," *Journal of African History* 6 (1965): 25-37.

⁴² A.B. Mathews, "The Kisra Legend," *African Studies* 9 (1950): 144.

⁴³ Olayemi Akinwumi, "Oral Tradition in Changing Political Contexts: The Kisra Legend in Northern Borgu," *History in Africa* 25: (1998): 2-3.

Sahara Desert and the Sahel, settling on the west bank of the Niger River. There, Kisra's descendants established the Borgu State which consisted of the kingdoms of Bussa, Nikki, and Illo.⁴⁴

Borgu and Yorùbá tradition almost mirror each other as it relates to Odùdúwà/Kisra.

some of the Yoruba Oduduwa myths...have much in common with the [Benin] Edo (myths)...Generally, such myths connect the Yoruba origin and migration to Western Africa with basically the same geographic regions and historical events as those of the Edo do...the name Namudu/Lamerudu/Lamorodu can be traced right down to Benin as well as Yorubaland⁴⁵...Kisra may eventually be identical with Namurudu or, he may have been his son or brother...⁴⁶

While the Borgawa share Nàmúdù/Lámúrúdú as an ancestor with the Yorùbá, Kisra is much more likely to be Odùdúwà the son rather than Nàmúdù/Lámúrúdú the father, for central to both Odùdúwà and Kisra is their specific description as a powerful Arabian magician.⁴⁷ Also, most of the traditions have the father Nàmúdù/Lámúrúdú dying in Arabia rather than leaving Arabia. The Western scholarly tradition started by German archaeologist Leo Frobenius that identifies Kisra with the Persian (Sassanian) ruler Khusraw/Chosrau II (590-628) has nothing to really recommend it and may be dismissed.⁴⁸

But this Borgawan narrative which matches so closely the Yoruban narrative cannot be so simply dismissed as *Islamic feedback*.⁴⁹

Until the mid-1950's all the received traditions in Nigerian Borgu were unanimous that Bussa was established by Woru, the eldest son of Kisra (although [sic] some versions claim that it was Kisra himself), while Shabi and Bio, his younger brothers, established Nikki and Illo respectively...According to the various groups (of Borgu, i.e. the Beke, Batonu, Bokobaru, Kienga, Kanberi, and Laru), and as recorded by the first chroniclers of the region, Borgu was established by Kisra and his followers after their flight from Mecca.⁵⁰

[The Kisra legend] cannot be dismissed as valueless because biases are commonly found to inhere in legend...The versions of the Kisra legend do not stand by themselves, and the evidence that tends to that corroboration renders their relegation to the realm of the purely symbolic as empirically ungrounded, a somewhat perilous enterprise...The known versions of the legends were, for the most part, collected from indigenous informants and recorded by European travelers and colonial officials...⁵¹

⁴⁴ For different scholarly views of the Kisra legend see further: Phillips Stevens Jr., "The Kisra Legend and the Distortion of Historical Tradition," *The Journal of African History* 16 (1975): 185-200; Marjorie Helen Stewart, "The Kisra Legend as Oral History," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13 (1980): 51-70; F.F. de Moraes Farias, "A Letter From Ki-Toro Mahamman Gaani, King of Busa (Borgu, Northern Nigeria) About the 'Kisra' Stories of Origin (c. 1910)," *Sudanic Africa* 3 (1992): 109-132; Daniel F. McCall, "Kisra, Chosroes, Christ, etc.," *African Historical Studies* 1 (1968): 255-277;

⁴⁵ English trader Cyril Punch stayed on the coast and visited Benin City the 1880's and 1890's. Based on local informants he wrote: "tradition says the Bini came from a place north of the Niger originally, and lived under a King Lamorodu." Bondarenko and Roese, "Benin Prehistory," 542.

⁴⁶ Bondarenko and Roese, "Benin Prehistory," 542, 548.

⁴⁷ Odùdúwà had "great magical powers": Aimiwu, "Oduduwa," 86. Kisra: "The Kisra legend...tells of a magician king...driven out of Arabia": Mathews, "Kisra Legend," 144.

⁴⁸ L. Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa* (London, 1913), Chapter XXIX; Law, "Hamitic Hypothesis," 303. For a full treatment of this claim, and its weakness, see McCall, "Kisra, Chosroes, Christ, etc.," 255-277 and Mathews, "Kisra Legend," 144-47.

⁴⁹ Islamic feedback is when ideas from later written texts intrude into oral tradition, in this case when ideas from Islamic literature intrude into indigenous oral tradition.

⁵⁰ Akinwumi, "Oral Tradition," 1, 2.

⁵¹ Stewart, "Kisra Legend as Oral History," 54, 55, 60.

There seems to be general agreement today that some sort of migration took place during the seventh century.⁵²

There is, in fact, nothing which makes the essence of the tradition untenable.⁵³

The “strong implicit kinship” between these Borgawan and Yoruban traditions renders Law’s theory of the Oyo political fabrication of this history totally unconvincing. The Borgu tradition surely is independent and cannot be accounted for as Aláàfin Àtìbà’s political propaganda. We therefore must consider the overall narrative as authentic Yoruban and Borgawan tradition.

This strong kinship is shown most clearly in the Bussa royal “ritualized war against Muhammad,” which also demonstrates that the tradition’s ultimate origin and inspiration are not Islamizers in West Africa. Islam became the religious identity of the Bussa rulers beginning in 1920. Before that, the Bussa king ritually reenacted the sworn “mortal hatred” and promise of vengeance against Arabian Muslims for the death of Nàmúdù/Lámúrudú noted by Johnson. In Johnson’s retelling, it was Odùdúwà’s grandson, Qrànmíyàn, who attempted to exact this vengeance by advancing on Mecca from Ilé Ifẹ. But because he was unable to cross the River Tapa, he failed to reach the Muslim city. That this part of the narrative is generally authentic is strongly suggested by the Bussa royal ritual.⁵⁴

During the time of the Muslim afternoon prayer (‘*Aṣr*) the Bussa ruler enters his palace and has his mare saddled. He then performs the *Salla* (=ṣalāt, Islamic ritual prayer) behind an imam (Muslim prayer leader). Immediately after performing the Islamic prayer, the king mounts his mare with spear in hand and rides to and fro demanding the whereabouts of the man who “made” him perform the Muslim prayers. As he gallops thusly, the people laugh and answer their king: “Well, he has run away. He who caused you to do Salla has run away!” The royal wives then ask the king why he was chasing this man, and the answer is: because Muhammad the prophet of Islam forced the ancestor Kisra to perform Salla, and then Kisra came out and waged war on Islam. In another version of the ritual, the king would come out of the palace with spears in hand, shaking them and proclaiming war on Mecca.⁵⁵

This ritual is pregnant with implications. This royal challenge to Islam in which the king “[shouts] his [war] challenge to the Prophet” is surely the ritualization of the “mortal hatred” and sworn vengeance that the Oyo Aròkin mentioned to Johnson. The ritual, performed every year by Bussa’s traditional rulers, was discontinued during the reign of Emir Woru Babai (*Alhaji* Mahamman Sani), a Muslim. The ritual also confirms another aspect of the narrative as reported to Johnson: The quasi-Muslim identity of the ancestor (Odùdúwà/Kisra). This is presented in Johnson’s report as Odùdúwà’s former Muslim identity and later apostasy. In Bussa legend, it is presented differently, but the same point is made. We are told that, while Muhammad’s attempt to convert Kisra failed, he was yet “not entirely unsuccessful.” This is because Kisra agreed to perform the Muslim prayers (ṣalāt)

⁵² Stevens Jr., “Kisra Legend and the Distortion of Historical Tradition,” 188. The Kabau of Songhai assert that in the seventh century a great east-to-west migration across the Sudan occurred called the “Kisra Migration.” See Bondarenko and Roese, “Benin Prehistory,” 548.

⁵³ McCall, “Kisra, Chosroes, Christ, etc.,” 275.

⁵⁴ On which see Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias, “Qrànmíyàn’s Frustrated War on Mecca: Reflexes of Borgu Ritual in Johnson’s Yoruba Narratives,” in *Pioneer, Patriot and Patriarch. Samuel Johnson and the Yoruba People*, ed. Toyin Falola (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994): 121-132.

⁵⁵ de Moraes Farias, “Qrànmíyàn’s Frustrated War on Mecca,” 122-123.

twice a year, but no more. Muhammad, it is said, found this sufficient.⁵⁶ This is therefore the reason non-Muslim Bussa kings must perform the Muslim prayers. However, because Kisra later waged war on Muhammad and Islam – similar to the “apostate” Odùdúwà going to war with Muslims in Mecca – the Bussa kings must get up from this prayer and declare war on Muhammad and Islam.

The Borgawan Kisra-traditions and royal rituals are independent witnesses to the general authenticity of the Yoruban narrative of origins: they confirm for us the Arabian origins of some Yorùbá and of some of the kin-groups, such as Edo (and Hausa; see below). They confirm the quasi-Muslim identity of the ancestor and that he was a noted practitioner of Arabian magic. They confirm for us also the “mortal hatred” for Islam, but they also confirm that the situation was a bit more complicated than “hate.” It was love-hate, or at least acceptance-rejection.⁵⁷

V. *Evidence From Outside Yorubaland: Hausaland*



Hausaland

In northern Nigeria are the Hausa states (Hausaland) situated between the Niger River and Lake Chad, north of Yorubaland. According to both Yoruban and Borgawan tradition the Hausa ancestors were among those fleeing Arabia with Odùdúwà/Kisra.⁵⁸ It is therefore not

⁵⁶ de Moraes Farias, “Qrànmiyàn’s Frustrated War on Mecca,” 123-124.

⁵⁷ On the ambiguousness of the Islam-Borgawa and Islam-Yorùbá relationship see de Moraes Farias, “Qrànmiyàn’s Frustrated War on Mecca,” 125-126.

⁵⁸ Yoruban: Johnson, *History*, 4: “The Yoruba’s are said to have sprung from Lamurudu one of the kings of Mecca whose offspring were: -Oduduwa, the ancestor of the Yorubas, the Kings of Gogobiri and of the Kukawa, two tribes

unexpected that the Hausa origins legend makes the same basic point as the Yoruban and Borgawan traditions do, though on the surface it may appear to differ from these in an important way.

In the late nineteenth century, as Johnson's Arōkin informants were telling him of the Arabian origins of the Oyo-Yorùbá, Adam Mischlich, German district governor in Togoland, was told by an informant from the Hausa town of Katsina that the ancestors of the Hausa were two "Arabs" who settled in the Gabi (Daura) area.⁵⁹ According to the royal tradition of Daura, the oldest town and center of Hausaland, the Hausa apparently came from the Near East in two waves. An original group came from "Canaan" traveling via Egypt and North Africa through the Sahara to the Central Sudan, there founding the city of Daura. The first rulers of Daura were a line of successive Canaanite queens.⁶⁰ When this migration occurred is not stated. Lange argues that it occurred in the pre-Christian period, but his evidence is extremely subjective.⁶¹ Nevertheless, there is linguistic evidence supporting a pre-Christian migration into Hausaland and this may apply to this migration from "Canaan."

The Yoruban and Borgawan traditions relate Hausa origins to the Odùdúwà/Kisra migration, suggesting a Hausa migration in the seventh century. This may apply to the second migration allegedly led by an individual popularly known today as Bayajidda but apparently originally known as Bawo.⁶² According to current Daura court tradition, Bayajidda and his followers came to Daura from Baghdad via Bornu and there married the reigning (Canaanite) Queen (she thus represents the earlier, possibly pre-Christian migration) and had a son. Bayajidda also had a son with a local concubine. His wife's son will produce six male offspring which, along with himself, constitute the progenitors of the *Hausa Bakwai*, the Seven Legitimate Hausa states (Daura, Kano, Katsina, Zazzau, Gobir, Ranom Biram). His concubine's son will likewise produce seven sons who are the progenitors of the *Banza Bakwai*, the Seven Illegitimate Hausa states (Zamfara, Kebbi, Yauri, Gwari, Kororafa, Nupe, Yoruba).

According to this Bayajidda tradition, the Yorùbá and the Hausa share a paternal grandfather. This is consistent with the claim made in Yoruban and Borgawan tradition. That grandfather is none other than Nàmúdù/Lámúrudú, who is shared not only by the Yorùbá and Borgu traditions, but by the Hausa as well.⁶³ During the annual Gani Festival of Daura, which, according to Dierk Lange, is a royal reenactment of the Bayajidda legend, the king is followed in

in the Hausa country..." Borgawan: Hoskyns-Abrahall, one of the first colonial officials to serve in Borgu 1917-1925 wrote regarding the Kisra migration as explained to him by local informants: "This immigration was not confined to the ancestors of the Bussawa, but was comprised [sic] of the ancestors of the Bornu Chiefs, the ruling Yoruba, the Yaurawa, the Gobitawa, and the Katsinawa..." The Yaurawa, Gobitawa, and Katsinawa represent Hausaland peoples. Quoted in Akinwumi, "Oral Tradition," 2-3.

⁵⁹ Adam Mischlich, "Über Sitten und Gebräuche der Hausa," *Mitteilungen des des Seminars für orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin* (1907) III, 10:155-181 (155-163); Dierk Lange, "The Evolution of the Hausa Story: From Bawo to Bayajidda," *Afrika und Übersee* 70 (1987): 195-209 (199).

⁶⁰ On this Hausa tradition see Sir P. Richard Palmer, *Sudanese Memoirs, being mainly translations of a number of Arabic manuscripts relating to the Central and Western Sudan* 3 vols. (Lagos, 1928) III: 132-134; Dierk Lange, "Hausa History in the Context of the Ancient Near Eastern World," in Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa*, 215-305.

⁶¹ Dierk Lange, "The Bayajidda Legend and Hausa History," in *African Zion: Studies in Black Judaism*, ed. Edith Bruder and Tudor Parfitt (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 151 [138-174]. For a reasonable critique of Lange see David Henige, "Imported Intelligent Design, or Authochthonous Dynamic Equilibrium?" *Paideuma* 54 (2008) 265-269, esp. 267.

⁶² See Lange, "Evolution"; idem, "Bayajidda Legend," 141-142.

⁶³ A fact which is sufficient warrant to reject Law's claim that the "name [Lámúrudú] will doubtless have come from Johnson." Law, "How Truly Traditional," 217 n. 56.

procession by drummers who drum special beats signifying the words, "Lámúrudú, son of Canaan."⁶⁴

So the Yorùbá, Borgawa, and Hausa all trace their ancestry back to Nàmúdù/Lámúrudú. This is persuasive agreement. From another angle, though, the Yorùbá and Borgu traditions of origin diverge from the Hausa. As Lange points out: "the Hausa legend refers to origins from Canaan and Baghdad while the Yoruba tradition mentions Mecca as the point of origin."⁶⁵ While the Yoruban/Borgawan Lámúrudú is from the Hijaz in Western Arabia, the Hausawan Lámúrudú is from Canaan. Also, though there is good reason to identify the Kisra of Borgawan tradition with the Odùdúwà of Yoruban tradition, we cannot identify Odùdúwà/Kisra with Bayajidda of Hausa tradition.⁶⁶ This is so, not because the latter is to be identified with the tenth century Berber Abū Yazīd b. Kaydād who rebelled against and was killed by the Fatimids in 947, as some suggest.⁶⁷ The arguments for that identification are weak.⁶⁸ Rather the Odùdúwà/Kisra=Bayajidda identification is to be resisted because Bayajidda's individuality as it appears in Daura palace tradition is clearly mythical:⁶⁹ his legend shows an obvious local political agenda as well as serious indebtedness to pan-Islamic folklore and ancient Near Eastern myth.⁷⁰ This does not mean, though, that the Bayajidda-figure has no historical value. W.R. Hallam's suggestion in 1966 that this legendary figure actually personifies a people, the Semitic migrants into Daura, is very attractive.⁷¹ So while Odùdúwà/Kisra was an individual,

⁶⁴ On the Gani festival see Dierk Lange, "The Pre-Islamic Dimension of Hausa History," in Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa*, 171-213.

⁶⁵ Dierk Lange, "West Africa and the Classical World – Neglected Contexts," Paper Presented at the Conference of the African Studies Association in Germany (VAD) on June 3, 2004 at the University of Hannover. 13.

⁶⁶ *Contra* Lange, "Origin of the Yoruba," 584.

⁶⁷ As suggested, e.g., by W.K.R. Hallam, "The Bayajida Legend in Hausa Folklore," *Journal of African History* 7 (1996): 47-60.

⁶⁸ See especially Lange, "Pre-Islamic," 175. But note, Lange's identification of Bayajidda with the Assyrian ruler Assur-Uballit II (r. 612-609 BCE) is equally weak: "Bayajidda Legend," 158.

⁶⁹ See especially Mary Wren Bivins, "Daura and Gender in the Creation of a Hausa National Epic," *African Languages and Cultures* 10 (1997): 1-28; Lange, "Pre-Islamic," 169-173, 187-190; idem, "Hausa History," 235-236.

⁷⁰ "Such [Bayajidda] texts...contain the strongest component of literary motifs commonly identified with the literature of the Islamic Middle and North Africa, cultures and regions to which West Africa was connected by trade and religion from the fifteenth century. These elements include metaphorical devices, motifs and a particular representation of religious frontiers, all of which suggest the influence of a broader tradition of Islamic storytelling...The marriage between the Hausa queen, Daura, and Bayajidda, the hero from the East, most clearly places this version of the tradition into the popular literary heritage of Islam. The image of marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims is an important theme in Islamic literature, one often used to describe religious relationships of the frontiers of Islam...The image can be traced back to one of the early frontiers of Islamic conversion, medieval Armenia, where a cycle of legends focusing on the marriage of a renegade Muslim prince to a non-Muslim princess established the Islamic frontier for medieval Muslim scholars." Bivins, "Daura and Gender," 9, 10.

⁷¹ Hallam, "Bayajida Legend," 49, 55. See also J.E.G. Sutton, "Towards a Less Orthodox History of Hausaland," *Journal of African History* 20 (1979): 197-198, 199: "Political motives for manipulating the traditions are clear enough therefore...But it is difficult to imagine the whole tradition being invented root-and-branch by Gobir or Bornu, either individually or conspiratorially, or by Kano, Katsina or Zazzau in their centuries of power for that matter. For there are strong internal clues that the substance of the *bakwai* is an embodiment of old Hausa tradition, an idealized but not falsified picture of how Hausaland and Hausaness came into being. While we may forget about Bayajida himself, the sons of Bawo are...true brothers, comprising the old core of Hausaland. The legend is therefore a foundation charter not just for the states and their ruling dynasties but equally for the general Hausa peasantry...Had the story been devised at some late stage to justify the pretences (sic) of one or all of the great Hausa states, it is odd that Daura, overshadowed as it has been for centuries by Katsina and Kano, should be included in their number and more acknowledged as the senior...The *bakwai* legend enshrines the memory of how this Hausaness began in eastern Hausaland. Bayajida may be mythical, but certainly not nonsensical."

historical leader of a movement of people out of the Near East into West Africa,⁷² Bayajidda is a mythical personification of that migrating people. Despite some modern scholarly cynicism, the basic story no doubt reflects real historical developments.⁷³

Be that as it may, we still have the problem of the apparent conflict in the narrative of origins. Were these migrating peoples from Syria-Palestine (Canaan) and Baghdad (Iraq) or from the Hijaz? We can dismiss the Baghdad-talk, as Lange acknowledges:

In fact, the well-known town of Baghdad was only founded in 762 CE during the early Abbasid period, and it is hardly conceivable that the Kanuri and Hausa traditions refer to a migration from that city during the Islamic period. There is no evidence for such a migration and if a minor migration had occurred-in the Islamic period-it could not have given rise to a sacred kingship, which pre-Islamic Kanem certainly was...In view of these different designations it would appear that reshaping of the information concerning origins took place in terms of better understood Arabo-Islamic geographical notions...Baghdad and Yemen are therefore geographical designations borrowed from Arab historiography.⁷⁴

Indeed, most of the reports actually have “Bayajidda” coming from Arabia, not Baghdad.⁷⁵ As Dmitri M. Boddarenko and Peter M. Rose report from the Katsina version of this Hausa tradition:

The Namudu migration from Arabia took place, according to old traditions, shortly after the birth of the prophet Mohammed (ca. A.D. 570)...Namudu is described as the leader of a caravan which set out from Birnin Kissera (near Mecca) via Kugome (Zinder) and Chirkao (Kanche) and finally reached Daura. At this place, Namudu ordered a well to be dug and appointed the snake Ki as the guard...⁷⁶

In most traditions it is the son Odùdúwà/Kisra who actually migrates, not the father Nàmúdù/Lámúrudú. In any case, the Hausa of Gobir know nothing of a “Bayajidda” (a name only actually documented in very late versions of the tradition) from Baghdad. Instead, they claim that the name of their ancestor was Mohamman-Mai-Gitti (“Muhammad the owner of the ax”) who led them from Arabia to West Africa.⁷⁷ We therefore have no reason to doubt that the “Bayajidda”-migration was from Arabia, just as the Odùdúwà/Kisra migration was. But what of the migration from Canaan? Can we dispense with that as well? No we cannot, but we don’t need to. We need only correctly understand what is meant by ‘Canaan.’

⁷² Agiri, “Early Oyo History Reconsidered,” assumes Odùdúwà and the “names associated with the origins of the (Oyo) kingdom are euhemerized gods (11).” I believe this to be true as it relates to the deity Òbàtálá, but not Odùdúwà/Kisra. There is indeed a strong tradition of Odùdúwà as a deity, specifically as a goddess. “But,” as Ade Obayemi points out, “Oduduwa appear (sic) to have a *historical* meaning in Ile Ife as a man, as a king who had wives.” “Ancient Ile-Ife,” 161.

⁷³ Sutton, “Towards a Less Orthodox,” 201: “Despite the skepticism of some modern critics, the (*bakwai*) legends appear to reflect, albeit in idealized form, a real historical development. They represent a foundation charter for the Hausa as a multi-state ethnicity, and enshrine the vague memory of how Hausaland and ‘Hausaness’ began from a series of small centres (sic) and hill-bases on its eastern side.”

⁷⁴ Dierk Lange, “The Founding of Kanem by Assyrian Refugees ca. 600 BCE: Documentary, Linguistic, and Archaeological Evidence,” *Working Papers in African Studies* 265 (2011): 10 [1-43]. Lange alternative suggestion, “In all likelihood the original reference was in all cases to an older Mesopotamian town such as Nineveh or Babylon,” equally lacks solid support.

⁷⁵ “among the Hausa, the mythical dynastic ancestor Bayajidda is usually presented as coming from Mecca, although sometimes from Baghdad.” Law, “Hamitic Hypothesis,” 302; “Myths of early origin, like the Yorubas, centered on a single ancestor, Bayajidda, who like Oduduwa...came from the Middle East, probably Mecca.” John A. Shoup, *Ethnic Groups of Africa and the Middle East: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011) 116.

⁷⁶ Bondarenko and Roese, “Benin Prehistory,” 548; Lange, “Bayajidda Legend,” 143.

⁷⁷ Lange, “Pre-Islamic,” 187 [197].

VI. Canaan as Western Arabia

We find a tradition of West African groups originating in/with Canaan in several early Islamic sources, each inspired by the Table of Nations in Genesis 10. Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), in his *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, records a report according to which black Kan'ān (Canaan), son of Hām, son of Nūḥ (Noah), fathered the Sūdān ("Black peoples") of West Africa, the Qazān/Fazān and Zaghawā, etc.⁷⁸ Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) likewise lists Kan'ān's sons as Nūba, al-Zanj, Fazān and Zaghawā.⁷⁹ According to al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) Kan'ān's son Kush went west and crossed the Nile. Some of his descendants are West African groups like the Zaghawā and Kānim.⁸⁰ Muhammad Bello, son and successor of Usman don Fodio (d. 1817) who founded the Sokoto Caliphate of northern Nigeria, wrote his *Infāq al-maysūr* in 1812. In it, Bello presents his understanding of the origin of the Yorùbá:

The inhabitants of this province (Yarba), it is supposed, originated from the remnant of the children of Canaan, who were of the tribe of Nimrod.⁸¹ The cause of their establishment in the West of Africa was, as it is stated, in consequence of their being driven by Yar-rooba, son of Kahtan, out of Arabia to the Western Coast between Egypt and Abyssinia. From that spot they advanced into the interior of Africa, till they reach Yarba where they fixed their residence.

It cannot be said that Bello innovated this tradition of Yorùbá origins himself.⁸² He undoubtedly only committed to writing traditions related to him by Muslims in the north, traditions similar to those we just presented above.⁸³ But there is a peculiarity about the tradition offered to us by Bello, a peculiarity that leads us to the solution to our problem. While Bello reports that the Yorùbá originated as Canaanites, he says they were driven to West Africa *from Arabia*. If by "Canaan" we are to understand Syria-Palestine, as Lange and most others do, how come these Syrian-Palestinians to be run out of *Arabia* by the South Arabian Ya'rud b. Qaḥṭān? I believe that the problem is not with Bello's reporting but with our geographic assumptions about 'Canaan'. This is a problem that the late Kamal Salibi, Lebanese Christian historian from the American University of Beirut, solved; and in solving this problem, he also solved our problem of the apparent conflict between the Yoruban and Hausawan traditions of origin.

⁷⁸ *Corpus of early Arabic sources for West African history*, trans. J.F.P. Hopkins and ed. N. Levtzion and J.F.P. Hopkins (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1981) 14-15.

⁷⁹ *Corpus of early Arabic sources*, 376.

⁸⁰ *Corpus of early Arabic sources*, 30-31.

⁸¹ American Missionary Thomas Bowen in the 1850's asked around among the Yorùbá specifically about Bello's claim and found that "The Yorubas...themselves...know nothing of Nimrod." *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa, 1849-1856* (Charleston, 1857) 268.

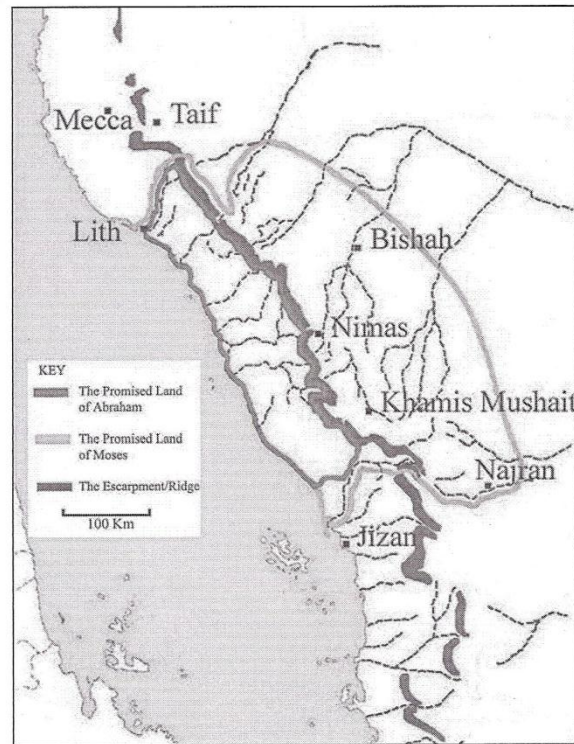
⁸² Contra Philip S. Zachernuk, "Of Origins and Colonial Order: Southern Nigerian Historians and the 'Hamitic Hypothesis' C. 1870-1970," *Journal of African History* 35 (1994): 434 [427-455]; Law, "How Truly Traditional," 202. "It is difficult to think of any reason why Bello – or other scholars before him on whom he relies – should have invented a tradition of Near Eastern origins to flatter people with whom he had nothing in common": Lange, "Origin of the Yoruba," 583.

⁸³ Dierk Lange, "Ifè and the Origin of the Yorùbá: Historiographical Considerations." *Ifè: Annals of the Institute of Cultural Studies* 6 (1995): 42 [310].

In his book, *The Bible Came From Arabia* (2007), Salibi argued quite persuasively using toponymic (“place-name”) analysis that “the true land of the Hebrew Bible is West Arabia, not Palestine.”⁸⁴ Correctly pointing out that archaeology has failed to turn up evidence in the Syria-Palestine area for most of Biblical history,⁸⁵ and pointing out equally correctly that the current vocalization of the Hebrew Bible was done by Jewish scholars nearly 1000 years after Biblical Hebrew had ceased to be spoken,⁸⁶ Salibi argues that the place-names of the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible actually indicates that most of Biblical history played out not in Syria-Palestine but in the West Arabian areas today of Asir and the southern part of the Hijaz. It is the case that identification of the biblical Promised Land with Palestine was made via an “unscientific” and “haphazard” approach to toponymic analysis by Biblical scholar Edward Robinson of the Union Theological

Seminary in New York who visited Palestine in 1837-8 and 1852.⁸⁷ A more rigorous toponymic analysis conducted by Salibi revealed that a large number of Biblical place-names actually have living counterparts and have their Biblical coordinates in western Arabia today, and that very few have living counterparts in Palestine; thus Biblical geography perfectly matches western Arabia but dubiously matches Palestine. Salibi therefore argued that “Judaism had originated

MAP 2



The Promised Land according to the Salibi Hypothesis

⁸⁴ Kamal Salibi, *The Bible Came From Arabia* (n.p.: Naufal Group, 2007 [1985]) 6. For an earlier and much more limited discussion of the Bible’s relation to Arabia see James A. Montgomery, *Arabia and the Bible* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934).

⁸⁵ “archaeologists working in Palestine are so frustrated. The world described in the historical narratives of the Old Testament seems so real. While the Hebrew text is highly detailed, the area described is quite small. Jewish and Christian traditions and the *raison d’être* of the state of Israel proclaim that this is the right place. But the failure to find a single trace of it is maddening. The Broad archeological picture is clear. There is no evidence of the Exodus, the conquest of the Promised Land, the establishment of David’s kingdom, the grandeur of Solomon’s public works program, the First Temple, records from the highly organized court bureaucracy, the wealth gained from control of the trade routes, or Omri’s impressive capital in Samaria.” Bernard Leeman, *Queen of Sheba and Biblical Scholarship* (Queensland, Australia: Queensland Academic Press, 2007 [2005]) 30. See further Thomas Thompson. *Early History of Israelite People from the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).

⁸⁶ “When the Palestinian and Babylonian Jews (who were ethnically distinct from the ancient Israelites) finally began to standardize the reading of the Hebrew Bible by using vowel signs, starting in about the sixth century A.D....many centuries had passed since Hebrew or any Canaanite dialect had been spoken anywhere, and the West Arabian origin of Judaism had long passed into oblivion.” Salibi, *Bible Came From Arabia*, 20. See also Leeman, *Queen of Sheba*, 51-52.

⁸⁷ Leeman, *Queen of Sheba*, 22.

not in Palestine but in West Arabia” and that “the history of the ancient Israelites, as narrated in the Hebrew Bible, ran its course there and nowhere else.”⁸⁸

Salibi argues that the ancient Israelites must have been originally a confederation of tribes in the West Arabian highlands and that the Israelite Kingdom was established in that area in the eleventh-tenth centuries B.C.E. Salibi also makes two points that are particularly relevant to our immediate discussion: 1.) that the Tables of Nations in Genesis – which ultimately undergirds the “Noahic-Canaaite” speculations of our Muslim authors cited above – “are actually lists of ancient West Arabia tribes and communities...”⁸⁹ 2.) that the true land of Canaan (*kn’n*) and the Biblical Canaanites (*h-kn’ny*) themselves are native West Arabian. He argues that the original Canaan comprised maritime slopes of Asir from the Ballahmer region in the north to the Jizan region in the south of Arabia.⁹⁰

The Canaanite peoples, as enumerated in Genesis 10:15-16, all have names which are gentives of place-names in different parts of Asir...the cities of the Canaanites, listed in Genesis 19 to fix the boundaries of the Canaanite territory, also survive by name there, where a local tribe has the name of al-Qin’ān (*qn’n*).

According to Salibi, Egyptian military intervention in western Arabia as well as the Assyrian invasion dispersed many Israelites and Canaanites northward. Spreading north these western Arabia emigrants gave their name to the land of Canaan along the Syrian coast north of Palestine, which the Greeks called Phoenicia. Keeping this in mind, a statement is illuminated in the *Kano Chronicle* which details the history of the Hausa people:

The people (Hausa ancestors) *went up* out of Canaan and settled in the land of Palestine. And a certain man among them named Najib the Canaanite went up out of Palestine with all his household and journeyed westwards into Libya, which is one of the provinces of Egypt and there they dwelt for many years...All these he begat before they came to Daura.⁹¹

If the reference was to the Canaan north of Palestine, the language “*went up* out of Canaan and settled in Palestine” is awkward at best, as we would expect a journey *down* from Canaan to Palestine. However, if the reference is to the original Canaan in West Arabia the wording would be perfectly consistent with the original Canaanite northward migration to Syria-Palestine.

Salibi’s discovery is supported by both Classical and Qur’ānic tradition. Herodotus (ca. 484-425 BCE) declared that the “Phoenicians,” the Greek term for Canaanites, dwelt anciently upon the Red Sea and later migrated to the Syrian seacoast (7.89). And, where the Qur’ān speaks of the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets of Israel, it cites a number of distinctly West Arabian place-names.⁹² For example, the Bible’s Horeb where Moses encountered the Burning Bush (Exod. 3:1f) is located by the Qur’ān in the Valley of Ṭuwā, which turns out to be on an isolated ridge on the maritime side of Asir, in a place today called Jabal Hādī.⁹³ As Genesis and much of the Hebrew Bible is “no more than a narration of ancient West Arabian legend,”⁹⁴ this has important implications for the Qur’ān and its “relationship” to Biblical tradition:

⁸⁸ Salibi, *Bible Came From Arabia*, 7.

⁸⁹ Salibi, *Bible Came From Arabia*, 158.

⁹⁰ Salibi, *Bible Came From Arabia*, Chapter 4.

⁹¹ Palmer, *Sudanese memoirs*, III: 132.

⁹² Salibi, *Bible Came From Arabia*, 35-36.

⁹³ Salibi, *Bible Came From Arabia*, 35-36.

⁹⁴ Salibi, *Bible Came From Arabia*, 158.

Where it relates Biblical stories, the Koran does not simply repeat Biblical material in variant forms, which is today a commonly held view among scholars. Its contents, where they correspond to the Hebrew Bible...are, I believe, independent versions of the same West Arabian historical traditions and must be treated as such. If the Bible represents the Israelite Hebrew version of these traditions, dating from times preceding the fourth century B.C., the Koran, where it treats the same traditions, represents the Arabic version of them, dating from a period when Arabic had already superseded Aramaic and Hebrew as the spoken language of West Arabia. The discrepancies between the two versions may appear confusing at first glance; upon further investigation, however, they can turn out to be enlightening.⁹⁵

Salibi's thesis also has significant linguistic support. Observing that the earliest segments of biblical Hebrew as a rule exhibit the highest percentage of Arabic cognates, University of Michigan Professor Emeritus George Mendenhall affirms that the further back we go in time the closer Hebrew is to Arabic.⁹⁶ Canaanite/Ugaritic, Hebrew's predecessor and parent language, was very similar to Arabic as well. In 1951 Chaim Rabin, Cowley Lecturer of Post-Biblical Hebrew at the University of



**Excavated Ras Shamra documents
showing "Arabic Ugaritic"**

Oxford, published his *Ancient West Arabian* in which he compared the several West Arabian dialects (Yemen, Himyar, 'Azd, North Yemen, Hudhayl, Hijaz, Tayy') with Hebrew/Canaanite and noted the "surprising similarities and parallelisms of West Arabian with Canaanite."⁹⁷ More recently documents excavated in Ras Shamra by the Lattakia Department of Archeology show that Ugaritic is very close to Arabic in grammar and vocabulary, with around 1000 cognate terms.⁹⁸ Evidence now suggests that Canaanite/Hebrew had once been spoken in western Arabia as far south as the Yemen border.⁹⁹

With so much at stake historically, religiously, and politically (e.g. the very foundation and legitimacy of the modern State of Israel) Salibi's work was predictably very controversial and provoked many negative reviews, but these reviews were more often than not filled with ridicule and scorn rather than substantive criticism.¹⁰⁰ While Salibi's work was based almost exclusively on toponymic data, Africanist and linguist Bernard Leeman reviewed the thesis in 2004 and concluded:

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⁹⁵ Salibi, *Bible Came From Arabia*,

⁹⁶ George Mendenhall, "Arabic in Semitic Linguistic History," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126 (2006): 22-3. However, on the weakness of Mendenhall's theory that Arabic was imported into Arabia from the Levant see Gary A. Rendsburg, Aaron D. Rubin, and John Huehnergard, "A Proper View of Arabic, Semitic and More," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128 (2008): 533-541.

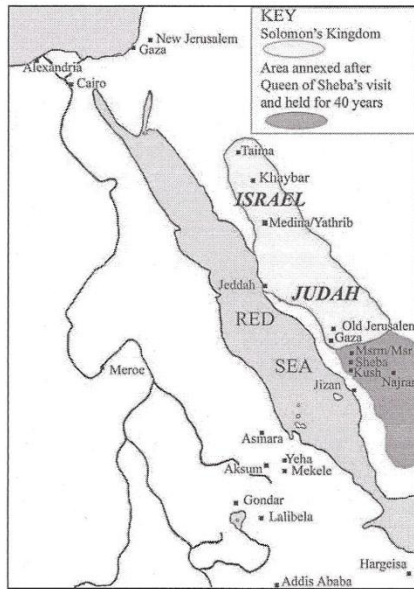
⁹⁷ Chaim Rabin, *Ancient West Arabian* (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1951).

⁹⁸ "Archaeologists: Ancient Texts Show Similarities between Arabic and Ugaritic Languages," *Archaeology Daily News*, April 16, 2010 at <http://www.archaeologydaily.com/news/201004163825/Archaeologists-Ancient-Texts-Show-Similarities-between-Arabic-and-Ugaritic-Languages.html>. See also Gary A. Rendsburg, "Modern South Arabian as a Source for Ugaritic Etymologies," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987): 623-628.

⁹⁹ Leeman, *Queen of Sheba*, 142.

¹⁰⁰ See Leeman, *Queen of Sheba*, 146-149.

MAP 3



**Ancient Israel's actual location
according to Leeman.**

In western Arabia there is a wealth of evidence from trade routes, state building processes, linguistics, place names, traditions, mineral deposits, environmental change, archaeological sites, religious development, an ancient Ark culture, and an extraordinary passage in the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* of the *Kebrā Nagast* that indicate this area and not Palestine was the true home of the Old Testament.¹⁰¹

Of equal importance is Leeman's acknowledgement that we are talking about an African culture:

...there are the ruins of western Arabia. Some archaeological excavation has been accomplished on the coast near Jizan that reveals a society with strong African links dating back to the second or even third millennium B.C.E. Pottery here is related to that of the same era in Hamasien, and in Nubia on the Nile...Archaeological evidence shows that a common culture did exist on the opposite shores of the Red Sea, ca. 1500-1000 B.C.E.¹⁰²

As the original (West) Arabians were an Afrioid people,¹⁰³ so too were the original Canaanites and Israelites, which is why Muslim tradition consistently identify Kan'ān (Canaan), son of Hām, as the father of the Sūdān, i.e. Black peoples.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Leeman, *Queen of Sheba*, 119.

¹⁰² Leeman, *Queen of Sheba*, 142.

¹⁰³ That West Arabians belong to an African cultural complex was highlighted in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* [9th Edition; 1:245-46 s.v. Arabia] which lists ten literary, linguistic, cultural, and ethnological evidences indicating some relation between Southwest Arabians and Africa: "(Regarding) [t]he origin of the Arab race...the first certain fact on which to base our investigations is the ancient and undoubted division of the Arab race into two branches, the 'Arab' or pure; and the 'Mostareb' or adscititions...A second fact is, that everything in pro-Islamic literature and record...concurs in representing the first settlement of the 'pure' Arabs as made on the extreme south-western point of the peninsula, near Aden, and then spreading northward and eastward...A third is the name Himyar, or 'dusky'...a circumstance pointing, like the former, to African origin. A fourth is the Himyaritic language...(The preserved words) are African in character, often in identity. Indeed, the dialect commonly used along the south-eastern coast hardly differs from that used by the (Somali) Africans on the opposite shore...Fifthly, it is remarkable that where the grammar of the Arabic, now spoken by the 'pure' Arabs, differs from that of the north, it approaches to or coincides with the Abyssinian...Sixthly, the pre-Islamic institutions of Yemen and its allied provinces-its monarchies, courts, armies, and serfs-bear a marked resemblance to the historical Africo-Egyptian type, even to modern Abyssinian. Seventhly, the physical conformation of the pure-blooded Arab inhabitants of Yemen, Hadramaut, Oman, and the adjoining districts-the shape and size of head, the slenderness of the lower limbs, the comparative scantiness of hair, and other particulars-point in an African rather than an Asiatic direction. Eighthly, the general habits of the people,-given to sedentary rather than nomad occupations, fond of village life, of society, of dance and music; good cultivators of the soil, tolerable traders, moderate artisans, but averse to pastoral pursuits-have much more in common with those of the inhabitants of the African than with those of the western Asiatic continent. Lastly, the extreme facility of marriage which exists in all classes of the southern Arabs with the African races; the fecundity of such unions; and the slightness or even absence of any caste feeling between the dusky 'pure' Arab and the still darker native of modern Africa...may be regarded as pointing in the direction of a community of origin."

¹⁰⁴ See David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 101, 107.

The original Canaan, then, was located in West Arabia. The Muslim traditions (e.g. Ibn Qutayba, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Masʿūdī) identifying Kanʿān as the progenitor of West African peoples must be read in this light and in the light of the Qurʾānic placement of Biblical lands and personalities within Arabia. We thus have every reason to identify the “Canaan” of Hausa tradition with the West Arabian area of Yoruban and Borgawan traditions. This is further supported by the emphasis in Hausa tradition on the dynasty of Canaanite queens that first ruled Daura. Nabia Abbot documented several pre-Islamic Arabian queens and assumed this to indicate the existence of the “right of independent queenship among the ancient Arabs at least as early as the tenth century before Christ.”¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, all three traditions – Yorùbá, Borgu, and Hausa – place the origin of these peoples or important segments of these peoples in Western Arabia.¹⁰⁶

Salibi’s work also provides a valuable corrective to some of Dierk Lange’s theories.

VII. *Linguistic and Anthropological Evidence*

In 1948 Pastor J. Olumide Lucas published his seminal work, *The Religion of the Yorubas*, in which he argued extensively from mainly linguistic and ethnological evidences that the Yorùbá were Egyptian migrants who crossed the Sudan into West Africa. Among the evidence offered, Lucas produced Egyptian derivations for the names of forty Yorùbá deities and 150 other Yoruban words.

Abundant proof of intimate connection between ancient Egyptians and the Yoruba may be produced...Most of the principle gods were well known, at one time, to the Yoruba. Among these gods are Osiris, Isis, Horus, Shu, Sut, Troth, Khepera, Amon, Anu, Khonsu, Khnum, Khopri, Hathor, Sokaris, Ra, Seb, the elemental deities and others. Most of the gods survive in name or in attributes or in both (religions).¹⁰⁷

Many writers before and since Lucas have noted remarkable similarities between Ancient Egyptian and Yoruban culture and religion, and most agree that there are elements of pre-colonial Nigerian technology that diffused from the Nile Valley. But Lucas’ claim went much further: the evidence of these remarkable similarities – largely linguistic and ethnological – led him to conclude that the Yorùbá themselves were expatriate Egyptians who left north-east Africa before the end of the Roman Period (4th cent. CE). “The Yoruba,” Lucas argued, “migrated gradually from Northern Egypt to Southern Egypt and then to the Sudan until they reached their current home” on the Atlantic coast.¹⁰⁸

Lucas’ Egyptian thesis is not in conflict with the Arabian thesis: Muhammad Bello’s account has the Arabian emigrants settling in Egypt before moving across the Sudan into West Africa. This tradition is certainly older than Bello’s nineteenth century informants. The famous Muslim historian al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 897) wrote his acclaimed *Taʾrīkh* in 873 and it includes the brief statement:

¹⁰⁵ Nabia Abbot, “Pre-Islamic Arab Queens,” *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 58 (1941): 1-22.

¹⁰⁶ Lange assumes that the Yorùbá and Borgu traditions of Arabian origins is merely an *interpretatio Arabica*, to be corrected in the light of the Hausa tradition of Canaanite/Baghdad origins. From there he speculates that the bulk of the Hausa migrants came from Syria Palestine, and their political leadership came from the Assyrian capitol of Nineveh. “Bayajidda Legend,” 164. We now see that such a “correction” is unnecessary and incorrect.

¹⁰⁷ J. Olumide Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshop, 1948) 20-21.

¹⁰⁸ See further his follow-up: J. Olumide Lucas, *The Yoruba Language: Its Structure and Relationship to other Languages* (Lagos, 1964).

The people of the progeny of Hām, son of Noah, left the country of Babel, went west, crossed the Euphrates, continued to Egypt and thence moved to East and West Africa. West of the Nile the Zaghawa settled in Kanem, next the (Hausa),¹⁰⁹ then the Kawkaw and finally the people of Ghana.¹¹⁰

Al-Ya'qūbī's account of the Near Eastern origins of West African peoples who first settled in Egypt before moving southwards probably relies on indigenous West African oral traditions reported to him by Arab traders who heard them while engaged in their work in Africa.¹¹¹

Several scholars have followed Lucas in positing an Egyptian origin of the Yorùbá.¹¹² On the other hand, Lucas' linguistic evidence has been rightly called into question. Because his training was in theology and not philology or linguistics, his etymologies more often than not lacked rigor and were unconvincing.¹¹³ The linguistic knowledge gained since Lucas wrote has only highlighted his shortcoming, or so it would seem.

On the basis of language...the Yoruba people could not have originated from either Arabia, Egypt, or Nubia...the Yoruba language has no family relationship with Arabic, the primary language of the people of Mecca and the rest of Arabia...For similar reasons, the attempt by Olumide Lucas to use language, among other things, to trace the origin of the Yoruba people to Egypt has been shown to be an unscientific and futile exercise, and, so, needs no further attention here....¹¹⁴

The linguistic evidence has indeed been the strongest argument against an Arabian-Egyptian origin of the Yorùbá. J. 'Sina Ojuade summarizes the situation well: "affinities of the Yoruba language are over-whelmingly with languages of neighbouring West African peoples rather than with the languages of any of the people of the Near East."¹¹⁵ This is certainly the case. The various Yorùbá dialects and related languages, like Edo, are part of the Kwa group of the Niger-Congo family of languages and likely originated in the Niger-Benue Confluence area.¹¹⁶ Glottochronology suggests that a Kwa proto-language located in the area of the Niger-Benue Confluence separated around 3-6000 years ago into proto-Yorùbá, proto-Edo, proto-Igbo, etc.¹¹⁷ It has been suggested that Yorùbá emerged as a distinct group anywhere from 2000-500 BCE.¹¹⁸ The implications of this data are clear enough:

¹⁰⁹ On the text's "al-Ḥwḍ.n" as "Hausa" see Lange, "Bayajidda," 153.

¹¹⁰ Nehemia Levtzion and J.F.P. Hopkins, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 21.

¹¹¹ Lange, "Origin of the Yoruba," 584.

¹¹² P. Amaury Talbot argued that the Yoruba first arrived to Nigeria from Egypt maybe at the beginning of the two millennium BCE, being pushed out of their homeland by the Nubian wars or Hyksos conquest: *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria. A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages. Volume I: Historical Notes. Volume II: Ethnology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926). Likewise, Saburi O. Biobaku, suggested that the Yoruban home was in Upper Egypt. They migrated in two waves into Western Africa, ca. AD 600 and ca. AD 1000: *The Origin of the Yorubas* (Lagos, 1955); "An Historical Sketch of the Peoples of Western Nigeria," *Odu* 6 (1958): 24-28.

¹¹³ R.W. Wescott, "Ancient Egypt and Modern Africa," *Journal of African History* 11 (1961): 311-321; idem, "Did the Yoruba Come From Egypt," *Odu* 4 (1956): 10-1; Lange, "Ifè and the Origin of the Yorùbá," 311.

¹¹⁴ Atanda, "Samuel Johnson," 100.

¹¹⁵ J. 'Sina Ojuade, "The Issue of *Oduduwa* in Yoruba Genesis: The Myths and Realities," *Transafrican Journal of History* 21 (1992): 140.

¹¹⁶ Abiodun Adetugbo, "The Yoruba Language in Yoruba History," *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. S.O. Biobaku (Oxford, 1973) 178-83; Ade Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbors Before 1600," in *History of West Africa*, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London, 1974) I:194-201; Robin Horton, "Ancient Ife: A Reassessment," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9 (1964): 69-149.

¹¹⁷ See also Robert G. Armstrong "The use of linguistic and ethnographic data in the study of Idoma and Yoruba History," in *The Historian in Tropical Africa*, ed. J. Vansina, R. Mauny and L.V. Thomas (London and Ibadan: Oxford University Press for the IAI, 1964) 127-139.

¹¹⁸ Horton, "Ancient Ife"; J.A. Atanda, "The Origins of the Yoruba Reconsidered," *Odu* 25 (January 1984): 3-19.

The relevance of the above chronology...is that it rules out the Arabia-Egypt-Nubia theories of origin which severally and jointly placed Yoruba migration to their permanent homeland in the period after the rise of Islam in the seventh century AD. As now made clear, not only did the Yoruba originate in an area different from the ones suggested by the earlier theories, their migration had taken place at least a thousand years before the rise of Islam.¹¹⁹

But the situation is no longer that simple. First, we have pointed out that Arabian-Egyptian origins never applied to the whole “Yorùbá” linguistic group, just as it does not apply to the whole Edo linguistic group. There is thus no necessary conflict between linguistic data and oral tradition. The seventh century Arabian immigrants into Yorubaland via Egypt met people already in the land, and these Kwa-speaking peoples had been in the land for centuries certainly, maybe millennia. As Isola Olomola nicely informs us:

parts of Ife, Ijesa, Ekiti and Ijebu, etc., were inhabited by people with some measure of sophisticated political culture before the advent of Oduduwa...Thus, the common belief that the origin of Ile-Ife and the entire Yoruba world, as well as their social and political culture, dated from Oduduwa, needs some modification. What can be traced to Oduduwa is the emergence of a new dynasty and to a new political culture.¹²⁰

Olomola makes another point of crucial importance here:

the considerable amount of material and non-material culture of the autochthonous inhabitants that survived the political takeover shows beyond any reasonable doubt that the immigrant aristocratic group associated with Oduduwa was numerically inferior to the host community *and was culturally absorbed* (emphasis added).¹²¹

Because the Odùdúwà group was culturally absorbed, the linguistic identity of the resulting “Yorùbá” would have been that of the indigenous Kwa-speaking groups, which is exactly what the linguistic evidence tells us. The language of the immigrants is lost. However, it left enough of an impact on the host language for us to make an educated guess about what it was.

The linguistic evidence in fact shows extensive contact with Egyptian and Near Eastern languages. If Lucas produced his theory of an Ancient Egyptian-Yorùbá relationship without the benefit of training as a linguist, Nigerian Modupe Oduyoye is a linguist (and exegete) specializing in Yorùbá, Semitic, and Ancient Egyptian languages. In 1968 Oduyoye published an important article, “Yoruba and Semitic Languages,” arguing a genetic relationship between these two language groups.¹²² He later was able to argue specifically and explicitly that “Yoruba, is related to Hebrew.”¹²³ Oduyoye has a very reasonable explanation for the genetic relationship between Yorùbá and Hebrew:

the linguistic evidence...suggests that the ancestors of the Hebrews and the ancestors of black Africans once lived in the same speech community...from a common shrine which I locate in the Sahara before its dessication, the ancestors of the Jews migrated east at the time of the dessicating Sahara while the ancestors of black Africans migrated south. Neither stopped until they got to a viable river-the Nile, the Jordan, the Tigris, the Euphrates to the east; the Kwara (Niger), the Binuwe (Benue), the Kongo, the Zambesi to the south.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Atanda, “Samuel Johnson,” 101.

¹²⁰ Isola Olomola, “Ife Before Oduduwa,” in *The Cradle of a Race (Ife From the Beginning to 1980)*, ed. I.A. Akinjogbin (Lagos: Sunray Publications, 1992) 51 [51-61].

¹²¹ Olomola, “Ife Before Oduduwa,” 57-58.

¹²² Modupe Oduyoye, “Yoruba and Semitic Languages,” *Nigeria Magazine* 99 (1968): 304-308.

¹²³ Modupe Oduyoye, “The Spirits that Rule the world: African Religions & Judaism,” in *African Origins of the Major World Religions*, ed. Amon Saba Saakana (London: Karnak House, 1991) 59.

¹²⁴ Oduyoye, “Spirits that Rule,” 92.

If we replace above “Hebrews/Jews” with “Proto-Semites,” then we can agree 1000% percent with Oduyoye (see below). But it is Oduyoye’s 1996 publication, *Words & Meaning in Yoruba Religion: Linguistic Connections in Yoruba, Ancient Egyptian and Semitic*, that most forcefully and persuasively makes the case. Yorùbá, Ancient Egyptian, and Semitic in general (including Arabic), are shown to possess a great many cognates.¹²⁵ For Oduyoye, these cognates indicate that the languages are genetically related, and this helps advance his larger objective to document the “extremely remote”-but no less real-“relationship between Niger-Congo and Hamitic (Afro-Asiatic) language groups”.¹²⁶

Oduyoye’s work makes it clear that, at the very least, Yorùbá-speakers were in extensive contact with both Ancient Egyptian-speakers and Semitic-speakers, and this linguistic evidence strongly supports the Yoruban tradition that has the Oyo-Yorùbá originating in and emigrating from Arabia, then residing for some time in Egypt before moving on and finally settling among the autochthonous peoples of Yorubaland.

We can add to this some anthropological observations that indicate that the Yorùbá as currently defined is a composite group. Graham Connah observed in 1969:

It does seem that at least in part the Yorùbá did have some sort of Sudanic origin and were not originally all forest zone dwellers...Thus the modern Yorùbá are very likely a composite product resulting from intermixing of people already in the forest with others emanating from the Sudanic Zone.¹²⁷

F. Willet made a similar observation:

The Yoruba are racially very mixed, ranging from typical Sudanic Negroes to what an earlier generation would have called ‘pure Hamites’, and it does seem likely that some of the people have come into the area from outside, very probably as a ruling group who eventually intermarried with the indigenes.¹²⁸

This anthropological fact has an instructive etiology in a Hausa tradition cited earlier. We recall the Katsina oral tradition shared with German colonial administrator Adam Mischlich according to which the Hausa ancestors were two “Arabs.” We learn further that one of the Arabs arrived in West Africa with a daughter whom he married to a local, indigenous man. These two – Arabian woman and African man – have a son, Bawo, the famed ancestor of the Hausa Bakwai or Seven Legitimate Hausa States. This means that the Hausa people, not unlike the Yorùbá, are a composite people deriving from the immigrating (Black) Arabs and the local indigenous Africans: “Dynastic Ile-Ife was the fusion, the compromise of the two”¹²⁹; “a new composite and unique language, religion, government, and social norm which, in all probability, replaced a much older one.”¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Modupe Oduyoye, *Words & Meaning in Yoruba Religion: Linguistic Connections in Yoruba, Ancient Egyptian and Semitic* (London: Karnak House, 1996). On Yorùbá-Arabic cognates in particular see Ilūrī, *Aṣl Qabā’il Yūrūbā*, Section XIV.

¹²⁶ Oduyoye, *Sons of the Gods*, 34.

¹²⁷ Graham Connah in *Lectures on Nigerian Prehistory and Archaeology*, ed. Thurston Shaw (Ibadan University Press, 1969) 48.

¹²⁸ F. Willett, “Ife and its Archaeology,” in *Papers in African Prehistory*, ed. J.D. Fage and R.A. Oliver (Cambridge, 1970) 304.

¹²⁹ Obayemi, “Ancient Ile-Ife,” 2:171.

¹³⁰ Olomola, “Ife Before Oduduwa,” 60.

Odùdúwà the Black Arab

There is thus every reason to accept the Oyo-Yorùbá tradition of Arabian origins as authentic. Odùdúwà and his group were unquestionably *not* from among the indigenes of Ife:

There are conflicting stories in Yoruba mythology about his origins but one thing is certain is that Oduduwa was a foreigner who settled in Ile-Ife.¹³¹

there must be some foreignness in Oduduwa.¹³²

The Oduduwa (Oodua) – Obatala legends, the Igbo-Ile rivalries...answer unequivocally in favour of the imposition of a new order from outside: i.e. of Oodua landing from 'Orun' (heaven) on Ora Hill and from there encroaching upon, overwhelming and being resisted by the bearers of the indigenous culture...¹³³

It was the case of the migrant 'conquerors' engrafting their system on to an indigenous one already too powerful and too well entrenched and systematized to be erased altogether...¹³⁴

All of the evidence indicates that the "Odùdúwà Revolution" was "the imposition of a new order from outside." The indigenous "Igbo" and others resisted the new order, but eventually a "compromise culture" was born which we now call "Yorùbá."

There are, though, two objections raised against understanding Odùdúwà's "foreignness" as "Arabness". O.E.I. Aimiuwu reasons:

The implication of the theory that Oduduwa and his followers came from Mecca or Upper Egypt is that they were Arabs, but Oduduwa is not an Arabic name. If Oduduwa were really an Arab it is very unlikely that he would have born a non-Arabic name.¹³⁵

It is the case that "Odùdúwà" is, as Fatima Mounkaïla and Jefferey S. Ankrom point out, a "more Sudanese-sounding name".¹³⁶ It is also the case, however, that "Odùdúwà" was not actually the name of the leader of the seventh century migration into Yorubaland.¹³⁷ "Odùdúwà" is actually the name of the primordial goddess of the Yorùbá that was for some reason transferred to the male dynastic founder.¹³⁸ The earliest recorded version of the tradition



Statue of Odùdúwà outside Odùdúwà University in Ilé Ife, Nigeria

¹³¹ O.E.I. Aimiuwu, "Oduduwa," *Nigeria Magazine* 107-109 (1971): 85.

¹³² Agbaje-Williams, "Archeology," 110.

¹³³ J. 'Sina Ojuade, "The Issue of Oduduwa in Yoruba Genesis: The Myths and Realities," *Transafrican Journal of History* 21 (1992): 144 (139-158).

¹³⁴ Ade Obayemi, "Ancient Ile-Ife: Another Cultural Historical Reinterpretation," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9 (1979): 167 (151-185).

¹³⁵ Aimiuwu, "Oduduwa," 86.

¹³⁶ Mounkaïla and Ankrom, "Ancestors from the East," 16.

¹³⁷ A fact which, incidentally, Aimiuwu acknowledges. "Oduduwa," 87.

¹³⁸ Lucas, *Religion of the Yorubas*, 93 and below.

to give a name calls the ancestor who founded Ilé-Ife, Okanbi.¹³⁹ We have no reason to assume that this is any more than a local adaptation, either. In fact in another early version cited by Bishop Emmanuel Moses Lijadu in his published notes on Egba history which were serialized in the Egba Government Gazette, the name of the Yoruban dynastic ancestor is Momo,¹⁴⁰ “which is the usual Yoruba form of the name Muhammad.”¹⁴¹ As Law says as well: “It does not appear...that the Prophet himself was intended.” At the end of the day, we have no idea what the dynastic founder’s name actually was, but it was not Odùdúwà, so Aimiwu’s objection amounts to nothing.

Nor is Cornelius O. Adepegba’s objection any more solid:

The suggestion that the original home of the Oduduwa group was in Mecca...as indicated in the traditions of migration, is far from reality. The [Yorùbá] people...are negroes and so also must have been the immigrants.¹⁴²

And the Arabian immigrants were undoubtedly “negro” too, for the true Arab, as we have demonstrated, was/is Black.¹⁴³ As Runoko Rashidi documents:

The Arabian Peninsula...was, like much of Asia, first populated by Black people...Some of the surviving Black populations, known as the Veddoids, are major portions of the Mahra population found still in the extremities of Arabia.¹⁴⁴

And as Dana Marniche confirms, this ethnological fact was equally true during Odùdúwà’s period:

the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula...long after the time of Mohammed shared the appearance of Ethiopians and other sub-Saharan Africans, as well as customs of present day Africans stretching from the present country of Sudan to Somalia in the East to Mauritania, Mali and Nigeria in the West (emphasis mine).¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Samuel Crowther, *A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (London, 1843) i-ii; Law, “How Truly Traditional,” 216 n. 33.

¹⁴⁰ “Fragments of Egba National History,” *Egba Government Gazette*, no. 1 (February 1904).

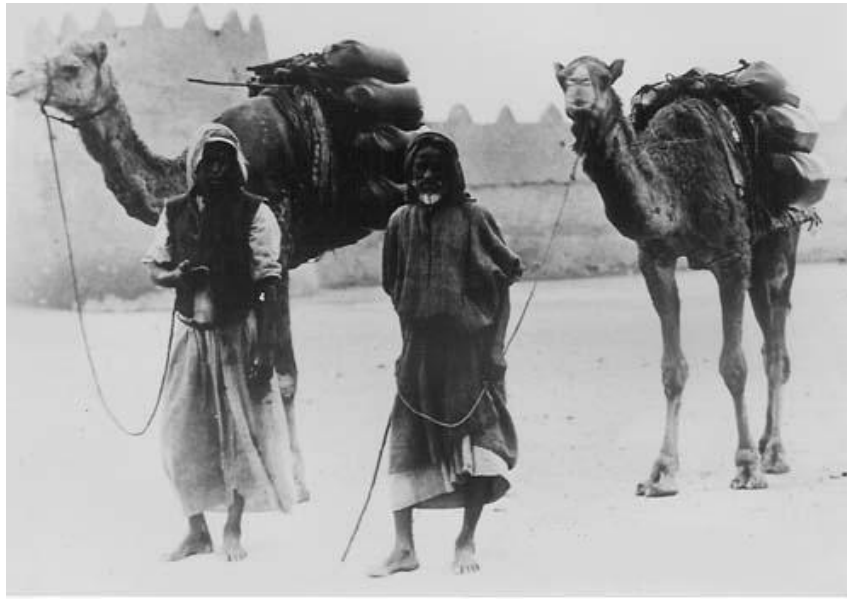
¹⁴¹ Law, “How Many Times,” 216 no. 33; idem, “Heritage,” 209 n. 9

¹⁴² Cornelius O. Adepegba, “The Descent From Oduduwa: Claims of Superiority Among Some Yoruba Traditional Rulers and the Arts of Ancient Ife,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19 (1986): 87 [art.=77-92].

¹⁴³ See Wesley Muhammad, *Black Arabia and the African Origin of Islam* (Atlanta: A-Team Publishing, 2009); idem, “The African Presence in Arabia,” in Runoko Rashidi, *African Star Over Asia: The Black Presence in the East* (London: Books of Africa Limited, 2012) 309-327.

¹⁴⁴ Runoko Rashidi, “Africans in Early Asian Civilizations: A Historical Overview,” in Runoko Rashidi and Ivan Van Sertima (ed.), *African Presence in Early Asia* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999) 28f.

¹⁴⁵ Dana Marniche, “Fear of Blackness: Descriptions and Ethnogenesis of the original Afro-Arabian tribes of ‘Moorish’ Spain Part I,” <http://www.africaresource.com/rasta/sesostri-the-great-the-egyptian-hercules/fear-of-blackness-descriptions-and-ethnogenesis-of-the-original-afro-arabian-tribes-of-%e2%80%9cmoorish%e2%80%9d-spain-by-dana-marniche/>



Black Arab Bedouin

There is also evidence directly related to Odùdúwà's blackness. In this very name given to him by posterity the central element *dudu* means 'black' and, according to Alfred Burdon Ellis, "The name means 'The Black One' (*du*, to be black; *dudu*, black)."¹⁴⁶ For this reason Odùdúwà the goddess – after whom "Odùdúwà" the male dynastic founder was for some reason named – "is always portrayed as a black woman".¹⁴⁷ More directly Kisra/Kishira, Odùdúwà's alternative name in Borguwan tradition, was most likely a title meaning "Black king."

The Kishra tradition possibly represents early Mandingan or Songhai (and perhaps ultimately Nubian) influence in Nigeria. The tradition is strongest at Busa where in the Mande dialect spoken kishira means "black king" (*ki* = king and *sira* = black).¹⁴⁸

This is further confirmed by an Arabic letter sent to the German elephant hunter E. Weber at Jebba by the Bussa king, Ki-Toro Mahamman Gaani (r. 1903-1915). The letter, written prior to the king's conversion to Islam, encloses a note on the history of Kisra written by Muslims in his court. In this historical note the Yorùbá and Borgu dynastic founder is specifically described as "Kisra of the Sūdān people [i.e. of the blacks]".¹⁴⁹

There are thus two things that we can now confidently confirm: Odùdúwà and the founders of the Oyo-Yorùbá were Arabian and were black: Black Arabs. M.D.W. Jeffreys' conclusion is therefore most appropriate:

¹⁴⁶ Alfred Burdon Ellis, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (London, 1894) 40-41. But cf. Lucas, *Religion of the Yorubas*, 95.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Earl Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-Talk* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990) 54.

¹⁴⁸ C.K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria* (London, 1925) 71.

¹⁴⁹ F.F. de Moraes Farias, "A Letter From Ki-Toro Mahamman Gaani, King of Busa (Borgu, Northern Nigeria) About the 'Kisra' Stories of Origin (c. 1910)," *Sudanica Africa* 3 (1992): 127.

it is known that there was in the Yemen of Arabia a tribe called Yariba¹⁵⁰ which seems to have arrived there from Canaan in the north and that this tribe was shattered by the Himyarites. Consequently if a group of Yariba migrated westwards and finally settled where the Yoruba are found to-day there is ample historical evidence to that they could be called Yoruba...There thus seems to be good grounds for the existence of a Yoruba group in Arabia which eventually migrated westwards and there does not appear to be much reason for rejecting the Yoruba tradition that they came from Arabia...one reads that when in Arabia the Himyarites came into power many of the other tribes were driven out of Arabia into Africa via Abyssinia. So that the Yoruba story of origin shows both internal and external consistencies and may be regarded as historically true. The Yoruba firmly believe that this story is part of their traditional history and is not a story borrowed from another people.¹⁵¹

Conclusion: Islam is as African a Religion as is Ifá

Islam was founded in Mecca by Black Arabs and Ifá was founded in Ifẹ by Black Arabs. In ways, both Islam and Ifá are developments from the ancient magico-religion of Black Arabia (see my forthcoming book, *Allāh and Olódùmarè: Islām and Ifá as Sibling Rivals*). This is what makes Islam and Ifá *siblings*. This means, among other things, that, just as we cannot fully understand Islam without a sufficient knowledge of pre-Islamic religious tradition in Arabia, we equally cannot fully or even adequately understand Ifá absent that same knowledge.

It is also the case that Ifá and Islam may very well *ultimately* be derivatives from ancient Nile Valley peoples and cultures: Islam an eastern derivation and Ifá a western derivation. Regarding Ifá Dr. Jacob Carruthers, in his work *MDW NTR: Divine Speech*, explains:

The Yoruba scholars at Ibadan...have presented a convincing case for the historical connection between the ancient Kemetic civilization and the living Yoruba tradition.

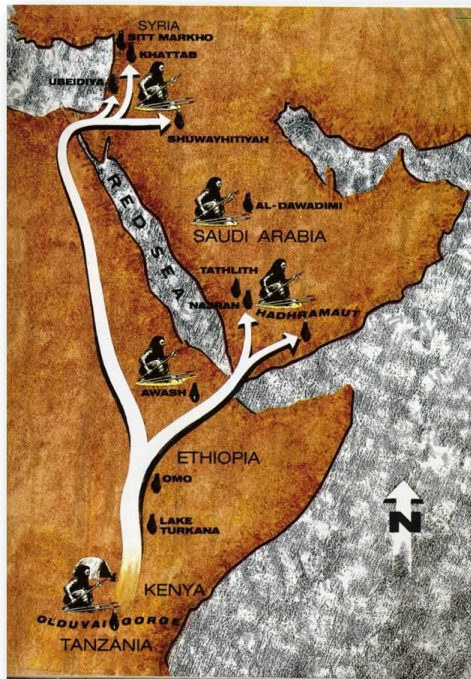
Throughout this chapter we have pointed to similarities among various African systems of thought (including Yorùbá) with a special focus on Kemet...In comparing the Deep Thought of Kemet with that of Basic Africa, *the patterns are too complementary, the resemblances too striking, the parallels too extensive, the connections too intimate* to be other than indicators of a profound unity. The question is one of anteriority. The age-old wisdom is that the pattern of Nile Valley civilization first emerged in Basic Africa and then traveled down to the area later occupied by Kemet, developed to a remarkable level and then returned to and influenced further developments throughout the continent [emphasis added].¹⁵²

That is to say, the living tradition of the Yorùbá shows remarkable similarities with ancient Kemet because ages ago African Tradition descended the Nile River, settling (some of it) in Kemet, and from there it later spread to other parts of Africa, including Yorubaland, no doubt in the early centuries before the common era (CE). The pre-Oyo tradition of Yorubaland likely derived from what these Egyptian migrants brought and what the West African autochthonous peoples whom they encountered already had.

¹⁵⁰ On the Yārib tribe of Yemen see A.T. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf* (London, 1954) 78.

¹⁵¹ M.D.W. Jeffreys, "Brahma alias Abraham: A Study of Diffusion," *Folklore* 70 (1959): 330, 331-32 [art.=323-33].

¹⁵² Jacob H. Carruthers, *MDW NTR Divine Speech: A Historiographical Reflection of African Deep Thought from the Time of Pharaohs to the Present* (London: Karnack House, 1995) 75, 87.



The situation for Islam is not the same but is similar. As I have demonstrated,¹⁵³ the evidence does not support the popular and oft-repeated claim that Islam derived from Kemetic Ma'at. Rather, the most reasonable conclusion that the evidence allows is that the remarkable similarities between Ma'at and (proto-)Islam¹⁵⁴ are due to them both being variant traditions of related African peoples who inhabited opposite sides of the Red Sea and who may have ultimately derived from the areas around the cataracts of Nile. Just as two children born from the same parent will have a similar genetic makeup because they share the genes of their father/mother, the commonalities between (proto-)Islam and Ma'at are due to their common heritage along the Nile but not necessarily in Kemet. The Proto-Semites who will later emerge as the Semites of Arabia (i.e. the "Black Arabs") likely separated ca. 8000-3000 BCE from their

parent Proto-Afroasiatic group in Middle Africa and followed the Blue Nile to the Ethiopian Highlands, crossing into Arabia from both the Bab el-Manded and the Isthmus of Suez.¹⁵⁵ Both Kemetic and Semitic cultures are children of the Nile Valley and offshoots of some of the African socio-religious traditions that coalesced along the 4200 miles of the Nile River. The Islam of Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims was one development from these ancient African systems of spirituality. Ma'at from Kemet was another such (earlier) development, as were the spiritual/religious systems of ancient Mesopotamia and ancient India.¹⁵⁶ These are all cognate systems.¹⁵⁷ The similarities *and the differences* that exist across all of these above cited religious traditions are to be understood in this context. Islam did not derive from Ma'at of Kemet; they are both branches from a common spiritual trunk, distinct fruits from the same African tree of spirituality, and this tree had roots along the Nile Valley.

Ifá and Islam therefore both have more recent Arabian origins and ultimate Nile Valley sources. While Yoruban heritage may be said to go back to Ancient Egypt in particular, all that can be said about (proto-) Islamic heritage is that it may go back ultimately to the Nile Valley,

¹⁵³ Wesley Muhammad, *Egyptian Sacred Science and Islam: A Reappraisal* (Atlanta: A-Team Publishing, 2012).

¹⁵⁴ By "Proto-Islam" I mean the ancient religious tradition of Black Arabia that morphed into the Islam of Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholas Faraclas, "They Came Before the Egyptians: Linguistic Evidence for the African Roots of Semitic Languages," in Silvia Federici (ed.), *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and Its "Others"* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 1995) 175-96; Gregorio del Olmo Lete, *Questions of Semitic Linguistics. Root and Lexeme: The History of Research* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 2008) 115; Edward Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters and Departement Oosterse Studies, 1997) 42-43; A. Murtonen, *Early Semitic* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), 74; Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002) 38, 57.

¹⁵⁶ See Wesley Muhammad, *Religion of the Black God: Indic Sacred Science and Islam* (Atlanta: A-Team Publishing, 2013).

¹⁵⁷ Cognate: related by blood and descended from a common parent.

but not necessarily to Kemet (though, as I have demonstrated, ancient Egypt/Kemet did later impact ancient Arabia, and ancient Arabia did impact ancient Egypt¹⁵⁸).

The late Dr John Henrik Clarke has stated:

From the great Nile Valley religions came Judaism, Christianity, and the elements that went into Islam. Islam came out of the Nile Valley. All these great religions are derivative religions...If I wanted a great religion I would bypass all of them and go to the original...Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all carbon copies of African religions. We need to go back and take the original and deal from the original rather than the carbon.¹⁵⁹

The first part of this statement by our great teacher Dr. Clarke is factually correct. That some of the substantive elements of the Judeo-Christian (Biblical and extra-Biblical) tradition derived from the Nile Valley, Kemet in particular, has been well documented. That substantive elements of Islam have parallels in Kemet has also been documented and, again, I have argued that the peoples of Arabia who are likely responsible for the religious tradition that later morphed into Islam ultimately derived from the Nile Valley regions (though not necessarily from Kemet).

So there is nothing historically problematic about Dr. Clarke's claim. His judgment that seems to derive from these facts, however, warrants reconsideration, especially in the light the foregoing. Is Islam, which originated with Africans in Arabia who migrated there from the Nile Valley area and which shows such remarkable similarities to Ma'at, to be rejected as a "carbon copy" religion? If we applied this same logic to Ifá we would have to discard it as a "copy-cat" religion, for it shows direct derivation from Ma'at in Kemet. If we modified Dr. Clark's words slightly, this is what we are asked to considered:

From the great Nile Valley religions came [Ifá], and the elements that went into [Ifá]. [Ifá] came out of the Nile Valley. All these great religions [of the Yorùbá] are derivative religions...If I wanted a great religion I would bypass [Ifá] and go to the original...[Ifá is] carbon cop[y] of African religions. We need to go back and take the original and deal from the original rather than the carbon.

What Africa-centered scholar will follow this logic and disregard Yoruban religious tradition as an expendable, "Johnny-come-lately carbon-copy" because it (partially) derives from the Nile Valley, Kemet in particular? None, I'm sure. Why then apply this dubious logic to Islam?

But it now gets deeper. We can tweak Dr. Clark's statement even further:

From the great [Black Arabian] religions came [Ifá], and the elements that went into [Ifá]. [Ifá] came out of [Black Arabia]. All these great religions [of the Yorùbá] are derivative religions...If I wanted a great religion I would bypass [Ifá] and go to the original...[Ifá is] carbon cop[y] of [Black Arabian] religions. We need to go back and take the original and deal from the original rather than the carbon.

While the first half of this statement is factually true, who will follow the judgment of the second half of this statement? Ifá *does* derive in part from Black Arabia. Is this a good reason to "bypass" it and go back instead to the original Black Arabian religion? I don't think so. Yet, if we enforce Dr. Clark's judgment of Islam then we must enforce this judgment on Ifá, lest we are guilty of an unjustifiable double standard.

¹⁵⁸ Muhammad, *Egyptian Sacred Science and Islam*, 95-103.

¹⁵⁹ John Henrik Clarke, *Africans at the Crossroads: Notes for an African World Revolution* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc, 1992) 260, 358

Continuing to deny Black Arabia and its products (e.g. Islam) their rightful place within the Africa-centered paradigm has serious consequences. For example it renders our Ifá-practicing Yoruban family a leg short: to deny Black Arabia is to make Ifá stand and hop about on one leg only.

If Islam is to be denied its Africanity, if you will, because it originated with Black people whose home was east of the Red Sea in Black Arabia, then Ifá's Africanity is to be similarly denied, for it similarly originated with Black people whose home was east of the Red Sea in Black Arabia.

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